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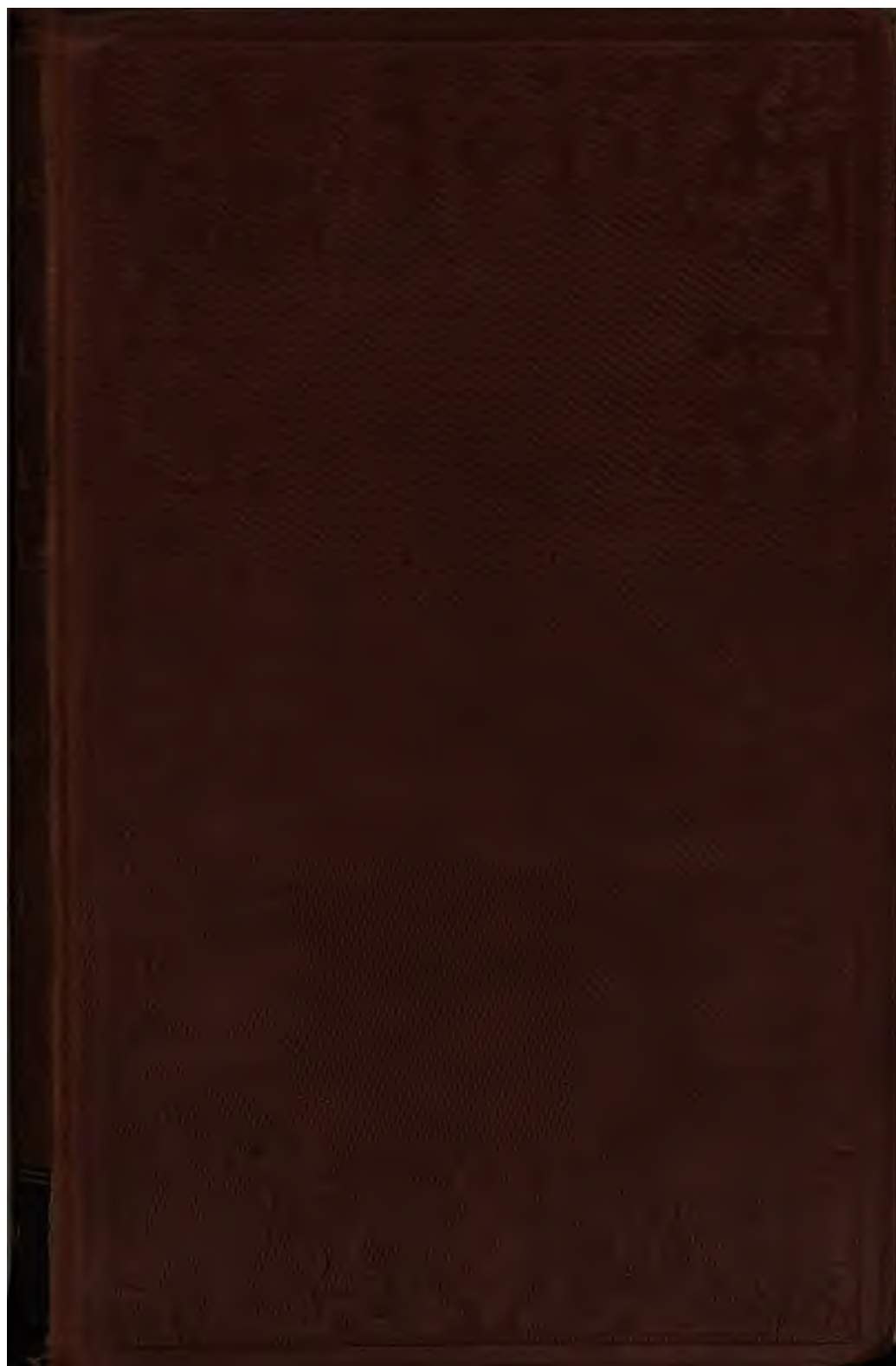
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HIDE AND SEEK.

HIDE AND SEEK.

BY

W. WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "ANTONINA," "RAHIL," &C.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

CHARLES DICKENS,

THIS STORY IS INSCRIBED,

AS A

TOKEN OF ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION,

BY HIS FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

I HAVE endeavoured, in writing this book, to combine interest of story and development of characters in nearly equal proportions throughout, so that the one quality should never attain undue prominence at the expense of the other. In the execution of this design I have met with many difficulties, which I have done my best to conquer in a genuine and workmanlike way—with what success it now remains for others to pronounce.

Although painters have already figured somewhat largely in works of fiction, I have ventured to introduce a Painter as one of the principal characters in the following pages; knowing beforehand, that whatever else I might do with such a personage, I was in no danger of making him imitate any of his predecessors. The Painter in this story only assumes to be a homely study from nature, done by a student who has had more

opportunities than most men, out of the profession, of observing what the varieties of artist-life, and the eccentricities of artist-character, are really like, when they are looked at close. It may be necessary to mention this, by way of warning, as I have ventured on the startling novelty (in fiction) of trying to make an artist interesting, without representing him as friendless, consumptive, and penniless—to say nothing of the more daring innovation of attempting to extract some amusement from his character, and yet not exhibiting him as a speaker of bad English, a reckless contractor of debts, and an utterly irreclaimable sot.

There is one other personage in the following story, about whom I had some preliminary words to say. But as saying them here might perhaps interfere with any little interest attaching to the first presentation of this character to the reader, they have been transferred to a Note at the end of the present Volume.

HANOVER TERRACE,
June, 1854.

HIDE AND SEEK.

OPENING CHAPTER.

A CHILD'S SUNDAY.

AT a quarter to one o'clock, on a wet Sunday afternoon, in November 1837, Samuel Snoxell, page to Mr. Zachary Thorpe, of Baregrove Square, London, left the area gate with three umbrellas under his arm, to meet his master and mistress at the church door, on the conclusion of morning service. Snoxell had been specially directed by the housemaid to distribute his three umbrellas in the following manner: the new silk umbrella was to be given to Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe; the old silk umbrella was to be handed to Mr. Goodworth, Mrs. Thorpe's father; and the heavy gingham was to be kept by Snoxell himself, for the special

protection of "Master Zack," aged six years, and the only child of Mr. Thorpe. Furnished with these instructions, the page set forth in gloomy silence on his way to the church.

The morning had been fine for November; but before midday the clouds had gathered, the rain had begun, and the regular fog of the season had closed dingily over the wet streets, far and near. The garden in the middle of Baregrove Square, with its close-cut turf, its vacant beds, its bran-new rustic seats, its withered young trees that had not yet grown as high as the railings around them, seemed to be absolutely rotting away in yellow mist and softly-steady rain, and was deserted even by the cats. The blinds were drawn down for the most part in every house; what light came from the sky came like light seen through dusty glass; the grim brown hue of the brick fronts looked more dirtily mournful than ever; the smoke from the chimney-pots was lost mysteriously in deepening superincumbent fog; the muddy gutters gurgled; the heavy rain-drops dripped into empty areas audibly. No object great or small, no out-of-door litter whatever

appeared anywhere, to break the dismal uniformity of line and substance in the perspective of the square. No living being moved over the watery pavement, save the melancholy Snoxell. He plodded on into a Crescent, and still the awful Sunday solitude spread grimly humid all around him. He next entered a street with some shops in it; and here, at last, some consoling signs of human life attracted his attention. He now saw the crossing-sweeper of the district (off duty till church came out) smoking a pipe under the covered way that led to a mews. He detected, through half closed shutters, a chemist's apprentice yawning over a large book. He passed a navigator, an ostler, and two costermongers wandering wearily backwards and forwards before a closed public-house door. He heard the heavy *clop clop* of thickly-booted feet advancing behind him, and a stern voice growling, "Now then! be off with you, or you'll get locked up!" and, looking round, saw an orange-girl, guilty of having obstructed an empty pavement by sitting on the curb-stone, driven along before a policeman who was followed admiringly by a ragged boy gnawing a piece of

orange-peel. Having delayed a moment to watch this Sunday procession of three with melancholy curiosity as it moved by him, Snoxell was about to turn the corner of a street which led directly to the church, when a shrill series of cries in a child's voice struck on his ear and stopped his progress immediately.

The page stood stock-still in astonishment for an instant, then grinned (for the first time that morning), pulled the new silk umbrella from under his arm, and turned the corner in a violent hurry. His suspicions had not deceived him. There was Mr. Thorpe himself walking sternly homeward through the rain, before church was over, and leading by the hand "Master Zack," who was trotting along under protest, with his hat half off his head, hanging as far back from his father's side as he possibly could, and howling all the time with the utmost power of a very powerful pair of lungs.

Mr. Thorpe stopped as he passed the page, and snatched the umbrella out of Snoxell's hand, with unaccustomed impetuosity; then said sharply, "Go to your mistress, go on to the church;" and

then resumed his road home, dragging his son after him faster than ever.

"Snoxy! Snoxy!" screamed Master Zack viciously (he had learnt that nick-name from the nursemaid) "I say, Snoxy!" (turning round towards the page, so that he tripped himself up and fell against his father's legs at every third step) "I've been a naughty boy at church!"

"Well, you look like it, you do," muttered Snoxell to himself sarcastically, as he went on; "Snoxy, too! I'll be even with Martha some day for teaching you that, Master Zack." With these sentiments, the page approached the church portico, and waited sulkily among his fellow-servants and their umbrellas for the congregation to come out.

When Mr. Goodworth and Mrs. Thorpe left the church, the old gentleman, regardless of appearances, seized eagerly on the despised gingham, as the largest umbrella he could get, and took his daughter home under it in triumph. Mrs. Thorpe was very silent, and sighed dolefully once or twice, when her father's attention

wandered from her to the people passing along the street.

"You're fretting about Zack," said the old gentleman, looking round suddenly at his daughter. "Never mind! leave it to me. I'll undertake to beg him off this time."

"It's very disheartening and shocking to find him behaving so," said Mrs. Thorpe, "after the careful way we've brought him up in, too!"

"Nonsense, my love! No, I don't mean that, I beg your pardon. But who can be surprised that a child of six years old should be tired of a sermon forty minutes long by my watch? I was tired of it myself I know, though I wasn't candid enough to show it as the boy did. There! there! we won't begin to argue: I'll beg Zack off this time, and then we'll say no more about it."

Mr. Goodworth's announcement of his benevolent intentions towards Zack seemed to have very little effect on Mrs. Thorpe; but she said nothing on that subject or any other during the rest of the dreary walk home, through rain, fog, and mud, to Baregrove Square.

Rooms have their mysterious peculiarities of

physiognomy as well as men. There are plenty of rooms, all of much the same size, all furnished in much the same manner, which, nevertheless, differ completely in expression (if such a term may be allowed) one from the other, reflecting the various characters of their inhabitants by such fine varieties of effect in the furniture-features generally common to all, as are often, like the infinitesimal varieties of eyes, noses, and mouths, too intricately minute to be traceable. Now, the parlour of Mr. Thorpe's house was neat, clean, comfortably and sensibly furnished. It was of the average size. It had the usual side-board, dining-table, looking-glass, scroll fender, marble chimney-piece with a clock on it, carpet with a drugget over it, and wire window-blinds to keep people from looking in, characteristic of all respectable London parlours of the middle class. And yet, it was an inveterately severe-looking room—a room that seemed as if it had never been convivial, never uproarious, never anything but sternly comfortable and serenely dull; a room that appeared to be as unconscious of acts of mercy, and easy, unreasoning, over affectionate

forgiveness to offenders of any kind—juvenile or otherwise—as if it had been a cell in Newgate, or a private torturing chamber in the Inquisition. Perhaps Mr. Goodworth felt thus affected by the parlour, especially in November weather, as soon as he entered it, for, although he had promised to beg Zack off, although Mr. Thorpe was sitting alone by the table and accessible to petitions, with a book in his hand, the old gentleman hesitated uneasily for a minute or two, and suffered his daughter to speak first.

“Where is Zack?” asked Mrs. Thorpe, glancing quickly and nervously all round her.

“He is locked up in my dressing-room,” answered her husband without taking his eyes off his book.

“In your dressing-room!” echoed Mrs. Thorpe, looking as startled and horrified as if she had received a blow instead of an answer; “in your dressing-room! Good heavens, Zachary! how do you know the child hasn’t got at your razors?”

“They are locked up,” rejoined Mr. Thorpe, with the mildest reproof in his voice, and the mournfullest self-possession in his manner. “I

took care before I left the boy, that he should get at nothing which could do him any injury. He is locked up, and will remain locked up, because"—

"I say, Thorpe! won't you let him off this time?" interrupted Mr. Goodworth, boldly plunging head foremost, with his petition for mercy, into the conversation.

"If you had allowed me to proceed, sir," said Mr. Thorpe, who always called his father-in-law *Sir*, "I should have simply remarked that, after having enlarged to my son (in such terms, you will observe, as I thought best fitted to his comprehension) on the disgrace to his parents and himself of his behaviour this morning, I set him as a task three verses to learn out of the 'Select Bible Texts for Children;' choosing the verses which seemed, if I may trust my own judgment on the point, the sort of verses to impress on him what his behaviour ought to be for the future in church. He flatly refused to learn what I told him. It was, of course, quite impossible to allow my authority to be set at defiance by my own child (whose disobedient disposition has always,

God knows, been a source of constant trouble and anxiety to me) so I locked him up, and locked up he will remain until he has obeyed me. My dear," (turning to his wife and handing her a key), "I have no objection, if you wish, to your going and trying what *you* can do towards overcoming the obstinacy of this unhappy child."

Mrs. Thorpe took the key, and went up stairs immediately—went up to do what all women have done, from the time of the first mother; to do what Eve did when Cain was wayward in his infancy, and cried at her breast—in short, went up to coax her child.

Mr. Thorpe, when his wife closed the door, carefully looked down the open page on his knee for the place where he had left off—found it—referred back a moment to the last lines of the preceding leaf—and then went on with his book, not taking the smallest notice of Mr. Goodworth.

"Thorpe!" cried the old gentleman, plunging head-foremost again, into his son-in-law's reading this time instead of his talk, "You may say what

you please; but your notion of bringing up Zack is—is, I'm certain, a wrong one altogether."

With the calmest imaginable expression of face, Mr. Thorpe looked up from his book; and, first carefully putting a paper-knife between the leaves, placed it on the table. He then crossed one of his legs over the other, rested an elbow on each arm of his chair, and clasped his hands in front of him. On the wall opposite hung several lithographed portraits of distinguished preachers, in and out of the Establishment—mostly represented as very sturdily-constructed men with bristly hair, fronting the spectator interrogatively and holding thick books in their hands. Upon one of these portraits—the name of the original of which was stated at the foot of the print to be the Reverend Aaron Yollop—Mr. Thorpe now fixed his eyes, with a faint approach to a smile on his face (he never was known to laugh), and with a look and manner which said as plainly as if he had spoken it: "This old man is about to say something improper or absurd to me; but he is my wife's father; it is my duty to bear with him, and therefore I am perfectly resigned."

"It's no use looking in that way, Thorpe," growled the old gentleman; "I'm not to be put down by looks at my time of life. I may have my own opinions I suppose, like other people; and I don't see why I shouldn't speak them, especially when they relate to my own daughter's boy. It's very queer of me, I dare say; but I think I ought to have a voice now and then in Zack's bringing up."

Mr. Thorpe bowed respectfully—partly to Mr. Goodworth, partly to the Reverend Aaron Yollop. "I shall always be happy, sir, to listen to any expression of your——"

"My opinion's this," burst out Mr. Goodworth, "You've no business to take Zack to church at all, till he's some years older than he is now. I don't deny that there may be a few children, here and there, at six years old, who are so very patient, and so very—(what's the word for a child that knows a lot more than he has any business to know at his age? Stop! I've got it!—*precocious*—that's the word)—so very patient and so very precocious that they'll sit quiet in the same place for two hours; making

believe all the time that they understand every word of the service, whether they really do or not. I don't deny that there may be such children, though I never met with them myself, and should think them all nasty little hypocrites if I did! But Zack is'nt one of that set: Zack's a regular natural, genuine, trump of a child (God bless him)! Zack——"

"Do I understand you, my dear sir," interposed Mr. Thorpe, sorrowfully sarcastic, "to be praising the conduct of my son in disturbing the congregation, and obliging me to take him out of church?"

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the old gentleman; "I'm not praising Zack's conduct, but I *am* blaming yours. Here it is in plain words:—*You* keep on cramming church down his throat; and *he* keeps on puking at it as if it was physic, because he don't know any better and can't know any better at his age. Is that the way to make him take kindly to religious teaching? I know as well as you do, that he fidgeted and roared like a young Turk at the sermon. And pray what was the subject of the sermon? Justification

by faith. Do you mean to tell me that he, or any other child at his time of life, could understand anything of such a subject as that ; or get an atom of good out of it ? You can't—you know you can't ! So, I say again, it's no use taking him to church yet ; and what's more, it's worse than no use, for it's only associating his first ideas of religious instruction with everything in the way of restraint and discipline and punishment that can be most irksome to him. There ! that's my opinion, and I should rather like to hear what you've got to say against it ? ”

“ Latitudinarianism,” said Mr. Thorpé, looking and speaking straight at the portrait of the Reverend Aaron Yollop.

“ You can't fob me off with long words, which I don't understand, and which I don't believe you can find in Johnson's Dictionary,” continued Mr. Goodworth doggedly. “ You would do much better to take my advice, and let Zack go to church, for the present, at his mother's knees. Let his Morning Service be about ten minutes long ; let your wife tell him out of the New

Testament, about Our Saviour's goodness and gentleness to little children; and then, let her teach him, from the Sermon on the Mount, to be loving and truthful and forbearing and forgiving, for Our Saviour's sake. If such precepts as those are enforced—as they may be in one way or another—by examples drawn from his own daily life; from people around him, from what he meets with and notices and asks about, out of doors and in—mark my words, he'll take kindly to his religious instruction; he'll understand it; he'll often come and ask for it of his own accord, as a reward for being a good boy. I've seen that in other children: I've seen it in my own children, who were all brought up so. Of course, you don't agree with me! Of course you've got your own objection all ready to bowl me down with?"

"Rationalism," said Mr. Thorpe, still looking steadily at the lithographed portrait as if he only desired to bowl Mr. Goodworth down under the immediate clerical auspices of the Reverend Aaron Yollop.

"Well! your objection's a short one this time

at any rate ; and that's a blessing ? ” said the old gentleman rather irritably. “ Rationalism—eh ? I understand that *ism*, I rather suspect, better than the other. It means in plain English, that you think I'm wrong in only wanting to give religious instruction the same chance with Zack which you let all other kinds of instruction have—the chance of becoming useful by being first made attractive. You can't get him to learn to read by telling him that it will improve his mind—but you can by getting him to look at a picture-book. You can't get him to drink senna and salts by reasoning with him about it's doing him good—but you can by promising him a lump of sugar to take after it. You admit this sort of principle so far, because you're obliged ; but the moment anybody wants (in a spirit of perfect reverence and desire to do good) to extend it to higher things, you purse up your lips, shake your head, and talk about Rationalism—as if that was an answer ! Well ! well ! it's no use talking—go your own way—I wash my hands of the business altogether. But now I *am* at it, I'll just say this one thing more before I've done :

—your way of punishing the boy for his behaviour in church is, in my opinion, about as bad and dangerous a one—not to mince matters—as could possibly be devised. Why not give him a thrashing? if you *must* punish the miserable little urchin severely for what's his misfortune as much as his fault. Why not stop his pudding, or something of that sort? Here you are associating verses in the Bible, in his mind, with the idea of punishment and being locked up in the cold! You may make him get his texts by heart, I dare say, by fairly tiring him out; but I tell you what I'm afraid you'll make him learn too, if you don't mind—you'll make him learn to dislike the Bible as much as other boys dislike the birch-rod!"

"Sir," cried Mr. Thorpe, turning suddenly round, and severely confronting Mr. Goodworth, "once for all, I must most respectfully insist on being spared for the future any open profanities in conversation, even from your lips. All my regard and affection for you, as Mrs. Thorpe's father, shall not prevent me from solemnly recording my abhorrence of such awful infidelity as I believe

to be involved in the words you have just spoken !
My religious convictions recoil—”

“Stop, sir!” said Mr. Goodworth, seriously and sternly. Mr. Thorpe obeyed at once. The old gentleman’s manner was generally much more remarkable for heartiness than for dignity ; but it altered completely while he now spoke. As he struck his hand on the table, and rose from his chair, there was something in his look which it was not safe to disregard. “Mr. Thorpe,” he went on, more calmly, but very decidedly, “I refrain from telling you what my opinion is of the ‘respect’ and ‘affection’ which have allowed *you* to rebuke *me* in such terms as you have chosen. I merely desire to say that I shall never need a second reproof of the same kind at your hands ; for I shall never again speak to you on the subject of my grandson’s education. If, in consideration of this assurance, you will now permit me, in my turn—not to rebuke—but to offer you temperately one word of advice, I would just recommend you not to be too ready in future, lightly and cruelly to accuse a man of infidelity because his religious opinions happen to differ on

some subjects from yours. To infer a serious motive for your opponent's convictions, however wrong you may think them, can do *you* no harm : to infer a scoffing motive can do *him* no good. We will say nothing more about this, if you please. Let us shake hands ; and never again revive a subject which we disagree too widely about ever to discuss with advantage."

At this moment the servant came in with lunch. Mr. Goodworth poured himself out a glass of sherry, made a remark on the weather, and soon resumed his cheerful everyday manner. But he did not forget the pledge that he had given to Mr. Thorpe. From that time forth, he never by word or deed interfered again in his grandson's education.

While the theory of Mr. Thorpe's system of juvenile instruction was being discussed in the free air of the parlour, the practical working of that theory, so far as regarded the individual case of Master Zack, was being exemplified in anything but a satisfactory and encouraging

manner, in the prison-region of the dressing-room.

While she ascended the first flight of stairs, Mrs. Thorpe's ears informed her that her son was firing off one uninterrupted volley of kicks against the door of his place of confinement. As this was by no means an unusual circumstance, whenever the boy happened to be locked up for bad behaviour, she felt distressed, but not at all surprised at what she heard ; and went into the drawing-room, on her way up stairs, to deposit her Bible and Prayerbook (kept in a morocco case, with gold clasps) on the little side-table, upon which they were always placed during week-days. Possibly, she was so much agitated, that her hand trembled ; possibly, she was in too great a hurry ; possibly, the household imp, who rules the brittle destinies of domestic glass and china, had marked her out as his destroying angel for that day ; but however it was, in placing the morocco case on the table, she knocked down and broke an ornament standing near it ; a little ivory model of a church steeple in the florid style, enshrined in a glass case. Picking up the frag-

ments, and mourning over the catastrophe, occupied some little time, more than she was aware of, before she at last left the drawing-room, to proceed on her way to the upper regions.

As she laid her hand on the bannisters, it struck her suddenly and significantly, that the noises in the dressing-room above had entirely ceased.

The instant she satisfied herself of this, her maternal imagination, uninfluenced by what Mr. Thorpe had said below stairs, conjured up an appalling vision of Zack before his father's looking-glass, with his chin well lathered, and a bare razor at his naked throat. The child had indeed a singular aptitude for amusing himself with purely adult occupations. Having once been incautiously taken into church by his nurse, to see a female friend of hers married, Zack had, the very next day, insisted on solemnising the nuptial ceremony from recollection, before a bride and bridegroom of his own age, selected from his playfellows in the garden of the Square; his performance on that occasion, being a thing to be

remembered, related, and giggled over, by every maid servant who had been present at it, for the special benefit of every marriageable follower who had not. Another time, when the gardener had incautiously left his lighted pipe on a bench, while he went to gather a flower for one of the local nurserymaids, whom he was accustomed to favour horticulturally in this way, Zack contrived, undetected, to take three greedy whiffs of pigtail in close succession : was discovered reeling about the grass like a little drunkard, and had to be smuggled home (deadly pale, and bathed in cold perspiration) to recover, out of his mother's sight, in the deep retirement and congenial gloom of the back kitchen. Although the precise infantine achievements here cited were unknown to Mrs. Thorpe, there were plenty more, like them, which she had discovered ; and the warning remembrance of which now hurried the poor lady up the second flight of stairs in a state of breathless agitation and alarm.

Zack, however, had not got at the razors ; for they were all locked up, as Mr. Thorpe had declared. But he had, nevertheless, discovered

in the dressing-room a means of perpetrating mighty domestic mischief, which his father had never thought of providing against. Finding that kicking, screaming, stamping, sobbing, and knocking down chairs, were quite powerless as methods of enforcing his liberation, the young gentleman suddenly suspended his proceedings; looked all round the room; observed the cock which supplied his father's bath with water; and instantly resolved to flood the house. He had set the water going in the bath, had filled it to the brim, and was anxiously waiting, perched up on a chair, to see it overflow—when his mother unlocked the dressing-room door, and entered the room.

“Oh you naughty, wicked, shocking child!” cried Mrs. Thorpe, horrified at what she beheld, but instantly stopping the threatened deluge from motives of precaution connected with the drawing-room ceiling. “Oh, Zack! Zack! what *will* you do next? What *would* your papa say if he heard of this? You wicked, wicked, wicked child, I’m ashamed to look at you!”

And, in very truth, Zack offered at that moment

a sufficiently disheartening spectacle for a mother's eyes to dwell on. There stood the young imp, sturdy and upright on his chair, wriggling his shoulders in and out of his frock, and holding his hands behind him in unconscious imitation of the favourite action of Napoleon the Great. His light hair was all rumpled down over his forehead; his lips were swelled; his nose was red; and from his bright blue eyes Rebellion looked out frankly mischievous, amid a surrounding halo of dirt and tears, rubbed circular by his knuckles. After gazing on her son in mute despair for a minute or so, Mrs. Thorpe took the only course that was immediately open to her—or, in other words, took the child off the chair.

“Have you learnt your lesson, you wicked boy?” she asked.

“No, I hav'nt,” answered Zack, resolutely.

“Then come to the table with me: your papa's waiting to hear you. Come here and learn your lesson directly,” said Mrs. Thorpe, leading the way to the table.

“No I won't!” rejoined Zack, emphasising the

refusal by laying tight hold of the wet sides of the bath with both hands.

It was lucky for this rebel of six years old, that he addressed those three words to his mother only. If his nurse had heard them, she would instantly have employed that old-established resource in all educational difficulties, familiarly known to persons of her condition under the appellation of "a smack on the head;" if Mr. Thorpe had heard them, the boy would have been sternly torn away, bound to the back of the chair, and placed ignominiously with his chin against the table; if Mr. Goodworth had heard them, the probability is that he would instantly have lost his temper, and soused his grandson head over ears in the bath. Not one of these ideas occurred to Mrs. Thorpe, who possessed no ideas. But she had certain substitutes which were infinitely more useful in the present emergency: she had instincts.

"Look up at me, Zack," she said, returning to the bath, and sitting in the chair by its side; "I want to say something to you."

The boy obeyed directly; he was never averse,

in his worst moods, to looking everybody straight in the face. His mother opened her lips, stopped suddenly, said a few words, stopped again, hesitated, and then ended her first sentence of admonition in the most ridiculous manner, by snatching at the nearest towel, and bearing Zack off to the wash-hand basin.

The plain fact was, that Mrs. Thorpe was secretly vain of her child. She had long since, poor woman, forced down the strong strait-waistcoats of prudery and restraint over every other moral weakness but this—of all vanities the most beautiful; of all human failings surely the most pure! Yes! she was proud of Zack! The dear, naughty, handsome, church-disturbing, door-kicking, house-flooding Zack! If he had only been a plain-featured boy, she could have gone on sternly with her admonition: but to look coolly on his handsome face, made ugly by dirt, tears, and rumpled hair; to speak to him in that state, while soap, water, brush and towel, were all within reach, was more than the mother (or the woman either, for that matter) had the self-denial to do! So, before it had well begun,

the maternal lecture ended abruptly and impotently in the wash-hand basin.

When the boy had been smartened and brushed up (he submitted pretty patiently to the cleansing operation), Mrs. Thorpe took him on her lap; and, suppressing a strong desire to kiss him on both his round, shining cheeks, said these words:—

“I want you to learn your lesson, because you will please *me* by obeying your papa. I have always been kind to *you*,—now I want you to be kind to *me*.”

For the first time, Zack hung down his head, and seemed unprepared with an answer. Mrs. Thorpe knew by experience what this symptom meant. “I think you are beginning to be sorry for what you have done, and are going to be a good boy;” she said, “If you are, I know you will give me a kiss.” Zack hesitated again—then suddenly reached up, and gave his mother a hearty and loud-sounding kiss on the tip of her chin. “And now you will learn your lesson?” continued Mrs. Thorpe. “I have always tried to make *you* happy, and I am sure

you are ready, by this time, to try and make *me* happy—are you not, Zack?”

“Yes, I am,” said Zack manfully. His mother took him at once to the table, on which the “Select Bible Texts for Children” lay open, and tried to lift him into a chair. “No!” said the boy, resisting and shaking his head resolutely; “I want to learn my lesson on your lap.”

Mrs. Thorpe humoured him immediately. She was not a handsome, not even a pretty woman; and the cold atmosphere of the dressing-room by no means improved her personal appearance. But, notwithstanding this, she looked absolutely attractive and interesting at the present moment, as she sat with Zack in her arms, bending over him while he studied his three verses in the “Bible Texts.” Women who have been ill-used by nature have this great advantage over men in the same predicament—wherever there is a child present, they have a means ready at hand, which they can all employ alike, for hiding their personal deficiencies. Who ever saw an awkward woman look awkward with a baby in her arms?

Who ever saw an ugly woman look ugly when she was kissing a child?

Zack, who was a remarkably quick boy when he chose to exert himself, got his lesson by heart in so short a time that his mother insisted on hearing him twice over, before she could satisfy herself that he was really perfect enough to appear in his father's presence. The second trial decided her doubts, and she took him in triumph down stairs.

Mr. Thorpe was reading intently, Mr. Goodworth was thinking profoundly, the rain was falling inveterately; the fog was thickening dirtily; and the austerity of the severe-looking parlour was hardening apace into its most adamantine Sunday grimness, as Master Zack was brought to say his lesson at his father's knees. He got through it perfectly again; but his childish manner, during this third trial, altered from frankness to distrustfulness; and he looked much oftener, while he said his task, at Mr. Goodworth than at his father. When the texts had been repeated, Mr. Thorpe just said to his wife, before resuming his book—

"You may tell the nurse, my dear, to get Zachary's dinner ready for him—though he doesn't deserve it for behaving so badly about learning his lesson."

"Please, grandpapa, may I look at the picture-book you brought for me last night, after I was in bed?" said Zack, addressing Mr. Goodworth, and evidently feeling that he was entitled to his reward now he had suffered his punishment.

"Certainly not on Sunday," interposed Mr. Thorpe; "your grandpapa's book is not a book for Sundays."

Mr. Goodworth started, and seemed about to speak; but, recollecting what he had said to Mr. Thorpe, contented himself with poking the fire. The book in question was a certain romance, entitled "Jack and the Bean Stalk," copiously adorned with illustrations of thrilling interest, tinted in the freest style of water-colour art.

"If you want to look at picture-books, you know what books you may have to-day; and your mamma will get them for you when she comes in again," continued Mr. Thorpe.

The works now referred to were, an old copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress" containing four small prints of the period of the last century; and a "Life of Moses," illustrated by severe German outlines in the manner of the modern school. Zack knew well enough what books his father meant, and exhibited his appreciation of them by again beginning to wriggle his shoulders in and out of his frock. He had evidently had more than enough already of the "Pilgrim's Progress" and the "Life of Moses."

Mr. Thorpe said nothing more, and returned to his reading. Mr. Goodworth put his hands in his pockets, yawned disconsolately, and looked, with a languidly satirical expression in his eyes, to see what his grandson would do next. If the thought passing through the old gentleman's mind at that moment had been put into words, it would have been exactly expressed in the following sentence:—"Oh, you miserable little boy! When I was your age, how I should have kicked at all this!"

Zack was not long in finding a new resource. He spied Mr. Goodworth's Malacca cane standing

in a corner; and, instantly getting astride of it, prepared to amuse himself with a little imaginary horse-exercise up and down the room. He had just started at a gentle canter, when his father called out, "Zachary!" and brought the boy to a stand-still directly.

"Put back the stick where you took it from," said Mr. Thorpe; "you mustn't do that on Sunday. If you want to move about, you can walk up and down the room."

Zack paused, debating for an instant whether he should disobey or burst out crying.

"Put back the stick!" repeated Mr. Thorpe.

Zack remembered the dressing-room and the "Select Bible Texts for Children," and wisely obeyed. He was by this time completely crushed down into as rigid a state of Sunday discipline as his father could desire. After depositing the stick in the corner, he slowly walked up to Mr. Goodworth, with a comical expression of amazement and disgust in his chubby face; and meekly laid down his head on his grandfather's knee.

"Never say die, Zack!" said the kind old gentleman, rising and taking the boy in his

arms. "While nurse is getting your dinner ready, let's look out of window, and see if it's going to clear up."

Mr. Thorpe raised his head from his book for a moment, but said nothing this time.

"Ah, rain! rain! rain!" muttered Mr. Goodworth, staring desperately out at the miserable prospect, while Zack amused himself by rubbing his nose vacantly backwards and forwards against a pane of glass, appearing exceedingly inclined to go to sleep during the operation—"Rain! rain! Nothing but rain and fog in November. Hold up, Zack! Ding-dong, ding-dong; there go the bells for afternoon church! Oh, Lord! I wonder whether it will be fine to-morrow? Think of the pudding, my boy!" whispered the old gentleman with a benevolent remembrance of what a topic of consolation that thought had often afforded to him, when he was a child himself.

"Yes," said Zack, acknowledging the pudding suggestion, but evidently declining to profit by it. "And, please, when I've had my dinner, will somebody put me to bed?"

"Put you to bed!" exclaimed Mr. Goodworth.
"Why, bless the boy! what's come to him now?
You used always to be wanting to stop up."

"I want to go to bed, and get to to-morrow,
and have my picture-book," was the weary and
whimpering answer.

"I'll be hanged" soliloquised the old gentleman under his breath, "if I don't think I want to go to bed too, and get to to-morrow, and have my 'Times' at breakfast! I'm as bad as Zack, every bit!"

"Grandpapa," continued the child, more wearily than before, "I want to whisper something in your ear."

Mr. Goodworth bent down a little. Zack looked round cunningly towards his father—then, putting his mouth close to his grandfather's ear, confidentially communicated the conclusion at which he had arrived, after the events of the day, in these words—

"I say, grandpapa, I hate Sunday!"

BOOK I.

THE HIDING.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD.

AT the period when the episode just related occurred in the life of Mr. Zachary Thorpe the younger—that is to say, in the year 1837—Baregrove Square was the farthest square from the city, and the nearest to the country, of any then existing in the north-western suburb of London. But, by the time fourteen years more had elapsed—that is to say, in the year 1851—Baregrove Square had lost its distinctive character altogether; other squares had filched from it those last remnants of healthy rustic flavour from which its good name had been derived; other streets, crescents, rows, and

villa-residences had forced themselves pitilessly between the old suburb and the country, and had suspended for ever the once neighbourly relations between the pavement of Baregrove Square and the pathways of the pleasant fields.

Alexander's armies were great makers of conquests; and Napoleon's armies were great makers of conquests; but the modern Guerilla regiments of the hod, the trowel, and the brick-kiln, are the greatest conquerors of all; for they hold the longest the soil that they have once possessed. How mighty the devastation which follows in the wake of these tremendous aggressors, as they march through the kingdom of nature, triumphantly bricklaying beauty wherever they go! What dismantled castle, with the enemy's flag flying over its crumbling walls, ever looked so utterly forlorn as a poor field-fortress of nature, imprisoned on all sides by the walled camp of the enemy, and degraded by a hostile banner of pole and board, with the conqueror's device inscribed on it—"THIS GROUND TO BE LET ON BUILDING LEASES?" What is the historical spectacle of

Marius sitting among the ruins of Carthage, but a trumpery theatrical set-scene, compared to the sublimely mournful modern sight of the last tree left standing, on the last few feet of grass left growing, amid the greenly-festering stucco of a finished Paradise Row, or the naked scaffolding poles of a half-completed Prospect Place? Oh, gritty-natured Guerilla regiments of the hod, the trowel, and the brick-kiln! the town-pilgrim of nature, when he wanders out at fall of day into the domains which you have spared yet for a little while, hears strange things said of you in secret, as he duteously interprets the old, primeval language of the leaves; as he listens to the imperilled trees, still whispering mournfully around him the last dying notes of their ancient even-song!

But alas! what avails the voice of lamentation? What new neighbourhood ever stopped on its way into the country, to hearken to the passive remonstrance of the fields, or to bow before the indignation of outraged admirers of the picturesque? Never was suburb more impervious to any faint influences of this sort, than

that especial suburb which grew up between Baregrove Square and the country ; removing a walk among the hedge-rows a mile off from the resident families, with a ruthless rapidity at which sufferers on all sides stared aghast. First stories were built, and mortgaged by the enterprising proprietors, to get money enough to go on with the second ; old speculators failed and were succeeded by new ; foundations sank from bad digging ; walls were blown down in high winds from hasty building ; bricks were called for in such quantities, and seized on in such hot haste, half-baked from the kilns, that they set the carts on fire, and had to be cooled in pails of water before they could be erected into walls ; and still the new suburb defied all accidents, and would go on, and did go on, in spite of everything, until it was actually an accomplished fact—a little town of houses, ready to be let and lived in, more or less, from the one end to the other.

The new neighbourhood offered house-accommodation, accepted at the higher prices as yet only to a small extent, to three distinct

subdivisions of the great middle class of our British population. Rents and premises were adapted, in a steeply descending scale, to the means of the middle classes with large incomes, of the middle classes with moderate incomes, and of the middle classes with small incomes. The abodes for the large incomes were called "mansions;" and were in a manner fortified strongly against the rest of the suburb by being all built in one wide row, shut in at either end by ornamental gates, and called a "park." Stucco, plastered over a framework wrought in the domestic-classical style of architecture, pervaded these buildings; flights of steps and Corinthian porticoes, carriage-gates, and carriage-drives up to the door, conservatories on one side, and coach-houses on the other, publicly asserted their right to be called "mansions" in the strictest and most opulent sense of the word. The unspeakable desolation of aspect common to the whole suburb, was in a high state of finish and perfection in this part of it. Irreverent street noises fainted dead away on the threshold of the ornamental gates, at the sight of the

hermit lodge-keeper. The cry of the costermonger, and the screech of the vagabond London boy were banished out of hearing. Even the regular tradesman's time-honoured business noises at customers' doors, seemed as if they ought to have been relinquished here. The frantic falsetto of the milkman, the crash of the wildly careering butcher's cart over the never-to-be pulverised stones of the new road through the "park," always sounded profanely to the passing stranger, in the spick-and-span stillness of this Paradise of the large incomes.

It was a curious result of the particular arrangement adopted in planting the new colony, that it connected the large incomes and the small by a certain bond of union, which had assuredly never entered the imaginations of the builders. As the rich neighbourhood was shut *in* from the general suburb, so the poor neighbourhood was shut *out* from it; the one serving in its way, as completely as the other, to keep the numerous habitations for the moderate incomes exclusively in their proper places; jammed in, locally as well as socially, between

the lofty and the lowly extremes of life around them.

The hapless small incomes had the very worst end of the whole locality entirely to themselves, and absorbed all the noises and nuisances, just as the large incomes absorbed all the tranquillities and luxuries of suburban existence. Here were the dreary limits at which architectural invention stopped in despair. Each house in this poor man's purgatory was indeed, and in awful literalness, a brick box with a slate top to it. Every hole drilled in these boxes, whether door-hole or window-hole, was always overflowing with children. They often mustered by forties and fifties in one street, and were the great pervading feature of the quarter. In the world of the large incomes, young life sprang up like a garden fountain, artificially playing only at stated periods in the sunshine. In the world of the small incomes, young life flowed out turbulently into the street, like an exhaustless kennel-deluge, in all weathers. Next to the children of the inhabitants, in visible numerical importance, came the shirts and petticoats, and

miscellaneous linen of the inhabitants ; fluttering out to dry publicly on certain days of the week, and enlivening the treeless little gardens where they hung, with lightsome avenues of pinafores, and solemn-spreading foliage of stout Welsh flannel. Here, that absorbing passion for oranges (especially active when the fruit is half ripe, and the weather is bitter cold), which distinguishes the city English girl of the lower orders, flourished in its finest development ; and here also the poisonous fumes of the holyday shop-boy's bad cigar told all resident nostrils when it was Sunday, as plainly as the church bells could tell it to all resident ears. The one permanent and remarkable rarity in this neighbourhood, on week days, was to discover a male inhabitant in any part of it, between the hours of nine in the morning, and six in the evening ; the one sorrowful sight which never varied, was to see that every woman, even to the youngest, looked more or less unhappy, often care-stricken, while youth was still in the first bud ; oftener child-stricken before maturity was yet in the full bloom.

As for the great central portion of the suburb, running out irregularly between the poor boundary on the one side, and the rich boundary on the other, until it actually reached the fields—as for the locality of the moderate incomes, it reflected exactly the lives of those who inhabited it, by presenting no distinctive character of its own at all.

In one part, the better order of houses imitated as pompously as they could the architectural grandeur of the mansions owned by the large incomes; in another, the worst order of houses respectably, but narrowly, escaped a general resemblance to the brick boxes of the small incomes. So, again, what the neighbourhood gained in dismal repose at one end, from such overflowings of superfluous “park” stillness as exuded through the ornamental gates, it lost at the other, from exposure to such volatile particles of noise and nuisance as floated free of the densely-vulgar atmosphere generated in the poor quarter. In some places, the “park” influences vindicated their existence superbly in the persons of isolated ladies who, not having a carriage to

go out in for an airing, exhibited the next best thing, a footman to walk behind them : and so got a pedestrian airing genteelly in that way. In other places, the obtrusive spirit of the brick boxes rode about, thinly disguised, in children's carriages, drawn by nursery-maids ; or fluttered aloft, delicately discernible at angles of view, in the shape of a lace pocket-handkerchief, or a fine-worked chemisette, or other article of ornamental linen, drying modestly at home in retired corners of back gardens. Generally, however, the hostile influences of the large incomes and the small, mingled together on the neutral ground of the moderate incomes ; turning it into the dullest, the dreariest, the most oppressively conventional, and most intensely (because negatively) depressing division of the whole suburb. It was just that sort of place where the thoughtful man, looking about him mournfully at the locality, and physiologically observing the inhabitants, would be prone to stop suddenly, and ask himself one plain, but terrible, question : " Do these people ever manage to get any real enjoyment out of their lives, from one year's end to another ? "

To the looker-on at the system of life prevailing among the moderate incomes in England, the sort of existence which, with certain pleasant exceptions, that system embodies, seems in some aspects to be without a parallel in any other part of the civilised world. In what other country but ours is social enjoyment among the middle classes with small means, deliberately denuded of all genuine substance of its own, for the sake of making it the faint reflection of social enjoyment among the higher classes with large means? Is this done anywhere else but in England? And is it not obviously true—melancholy truth!—that, while the upper classes and the lower classes of our society have each their own characteristic and genuine recreations for leisure hours, adapted equally to their means and to their tastes, the middle classes, in general, have (to expose the sad reality) nothing of the sort?

Life in the new suburb afforded proofs in plenty of this; as life does, indeed, everywhere else in England for the most part. To take an example from those eating and drinking recreations which absorb so large a portion of

existence:—If the rich proprietors of the “mansions” in the “park,” could give their grand dinners and be as prodigal as they pleased with their first-rate champagne, and their rare gastronomic delicacies; the poor tenants of the brick boxes could just as easily enjoy their tea-garden conversazione, and be just as happily and hospitably prodigal, in turn, with their porter-pot, their tea-pot, their plates of bread-and-butter, and their dishes of shrimps. On either side, these representatives of two pecuniary extremes in society, looked for what recreations they wanted with their own eyes, pursued those recreations within their own limits, and enjoyed themselves unreservedly in consequence. Not so with the moderate incomes: they, in their social moments, shrank absurdly far from the poor people’s porter and shrimps; crawled contemptibly near to the rich people’s rare wines and luxurious dishes; exposed their poverty in imitation by chemical champagne from second-rate wine merchants, by flabby salads and fetid oyster-patties from second-rate pastry-cooks; were, in no one of their festive arrangements, true to their incomes, to

their order, or to themselves; and, therefore, never thoroughly enjoyed any hospitalities of their own affording—never really had any “*pleasure*,” whatever their notes of invitation might say to the contrary, in receiving their friends.

Now, on the outskirts of that part of the new suburb appropriated to the middle classes with moderate incomes, there lived a gentleman (by name, Mr. Valentine Blyth, and by profession a painter), whose life offered, in more respects than one, a very strange and striking contrast to the lives of most of his neighbours—rotten with social false pretences, as they generally were, to the very core. On first taking up his abode in the new neighbourhood, Mr. Blyth quite unconsciously directed on himself all the surplus attention which older settlers in the colony had to spare for local novelties, by building a large and quaintly-designed painting-room at the side of his house, and so destroying the general uniformity of appearance in the very uniform row of buildings amid which he had chosen his dwelling-place. From that moment, people began, as the

phrase went, to talk about him. Some of the idler inhabitants made inquiries among the tradespeople, and curiously watched the painter and his household at available opportunities, both at home and abroad. The general opinion which soon proceeded from these inquiries and watchings was, that Mr. Blyth must be a very eccentric person; that he did all sorts of things which it was "not usual to do;" and that he presumed to enjoy himself in his own way, without the slightest reference to the manners and customs of the rich aristocracy planted in the neighbouring seclusion of the "park" gates.

Having arrived at these conclusions, and having thereupon unanimously decided that Mr. Blyth was anything rather than a gentlemanly person, the neighbours would probably have thought little more about the new-comer, but for one peculiar circumstance connected with him, which really made a deeper impression on all inquisitive minds than every one of his eccentricities put together.

It was more than suspected that some impene-

trable mystery lurked hidden in the privacy of the painter's fireside.

That Mr. Blyth was a married man, had been pretty clearly ascertained. That his wife was identical with a certain invalid lady, who had been carried into the new house wrapped up in many shawls, and had never afterwards appeared either at door or window, was a presumption very firmly established. So far, though there might be no absolute certainty, there was also no positive doubt that could fairly connect itself with the painter's household.

But the invalid was not the only female member of Mr. Blyth's domestic circle. There was also a young lady, who lived in his house, and who constantly accompanied him in his daily walks. She was reported to be a most ravishingly beautiful creature—and yet, no one could ever be met with who had seen her face plainly; for the simple reason that she invariably and provokingly wore her veil down whenever she went abroad. It grew to be generally asserted and believed that Mr. Blyth had never told anybody who she really was; and Calumnious Gossip,

starting with this rumour, soon got wonderfully and mischievously busy with her character, especially among servants and tradespeople. It was surmised in some directions, that she was the artist's natural child—in others, that she stood towards him in the relation of a resident female model, or perhaps of something more scandalously improper still. And it was further whispered about everywhere, that let her be who she might, she was most indubitably the victim of a very terrible misfortune. People shook their heads, and sighed, and murmured, "Poor thing!" or assumed airs of inquisitive commiseration, and said, "Sad case, isn't it?" whenever they spoke of her in the general society of the suburb.

Did this young lady deserve to excite other emotions besides contempt or pity? Did the painter really merit such unqualified condemnation as he received for not virtuously coming forward to suppress all scandalous reports about her, by giving a full, true, and particular account of who she really was? These were questions which the inhabitants of the suburb were all

unable to answer definitely, and for one good reason:—they had never so much as approached the gates of discovery, not one of them having crossed the mysterious threshold of Mr. Valentine Blyth's new painting-room.

CHAPTER II.

THE STUDIO.

It is wintry weather ; not such a November winter's day, however, as some of us may remember looking at fourteen years ago, in Baregrove Square, but a brisk frosty morning in January. The country view visible from the back-windows of Mr. Blyth's house, which stands on the extreme limit of the new suburb, is thinly and brightly dressed out for the sun's morning levée, in its finest raiment of pure snow. The cold blue sky is cloudless ; every sound out of doors falls on the ear with a hearty and jocund ring ; all newly-lit fires burn up brightly and willingly without coaxing ; the robin-redbreasts are bolder and tamer than ever this morning, and hop about expectantly on balconies and window-sills, as if they only waited for an invitation to walk in

and warm themselves, along with their larger fellow creatures round the kindly hearth.

Patty the housemaid has just kindled a glorious blaze, using logs of wood and lumps of coal together, in the grate of Mr. Blyth's painting-room. She stands warming herself before the fire, and staring about her, with reverential ignorance, at the different objects of art by which she is encompassed on all sides.

There happens to be another individual of the fair sex in the painting room, to keep Patty company, who merits some special notice, as rather a remarkable character. This lady stares like the housemaid, but suffers apparently from a severe attack of crick in the neck, and always gazes immovably in the same direction. By some extraordinary caprice of nature, her head is turned right round on her body, so that her face actually looks over her back instead of over her bosom. She is of average height, and not too fleshy; and wears, over false curls, a fisherman's red cap, surmounted by a cavalier's hat of the period of Charles the First, with a broken feather in it. One of her arms is stiffly

extended in an action of impressive gesticulation ; the other hangs at her side, apparently turned inside out. The flesh on these limbs is of a light and tawny brown colour. Her only dress is a toga of blue merino, very old, very dirty, and very ragged ; but tied under one arm and over the other, in the most strictly classical fashion. The peculiar position of her head renders her happily unconscious that this garment has fallen open in front, so as to render her lower extremities visible in a very improper manner. Looking merely at her plump and shapely legs (which, by the bye, are of just the same odd colour as her arms), any spectator experienced in such matters would infer, from their position alone, that the lady was extremely drunk, and ought never to have been admitted into the house of any respectable man. When to all this is added the fact, vouched for by competent witnesses, that the extraordinary female here described has stood in her present staggering and immodest attitude for the last *ten days*, without moving an inch one way or the other ; to say nothing of her having seriously startled

every visitor unaccustomed to such apparitions who has entered the painting-room, ever since her first establishment there; all unprejudiced judges must agree that the household of Mr. Blyth (so far as regarded this inmate at least), was fairly open to the animadversions of every respectable inhabitant throughout the whole suburb.

The immovably improper lady—let all English women be comforted as they read it—was a foreigner. She was of French origin; had a silk skin, a stuffed interior, and wooden joints, was distantly related to the ignoble family of the Mannikins, and bore the barbarous name of Lay Figure. Her business was to sit to Mr. Blyth, wearing any dresses he wanted to paint from. She was disliked instinctively both by cook and housemaid, and will always be found to exhibit herself in the light of a permanently bad character through the course of the present narrative.

“Drat the thing!” says Patty, spitefully pulling the lady’s toga into its proper place on leaving the painting room, “Drat the thing!

it's always showing its nasty silk legs, whatever you put on 'em. If master *must* have you, you great beastly doll, why don't he give you a petticoat? But nothing's what it ought to be here; I never see such an untidy place in all my life!"

Patty was right. Pictorial chaos reigned supreme in the new studio.

It was a large and lofty room, lighted by a skylight, and running along the side of the house throughout its whole depth. The walls were covered with plain brown paper, the floor was only carpetted in the middle; the furniture might have been fairly valued by any broker who looked over it, at the worth of twenty pounds. In each of the four corners broad wooden shelves were fixed, on which all sorts of objects great and small were crowded in compact masses, without the slightest attempt at order or arrangement. Plaster casts mustered strong in all varieties on these shelves; and were set together anyhow, with the most whimsical disregard of the persons, positions, and periods which they represented.

Thus, in one corner, Doctor Johnson appeared to be gazing down, stedfastly libertine, upon the bosom of the Venus de' Medici; who, in her turn, looked boldly across the lexicographer's nose at Napoleon Buonaparte. In another corner, the Fighting Gladiator straddled over Eve at the Fountain to assault the good-humoured features of Sir Walter Scott. Dusty little phials of oil and varnish, gallipots, bundles of old brushes, bits of painting-rag, lumps of whiting, dry knobs of sponge, tattered books, tangled balls of string, hard putty, an old hour-glass, broken hyacinth bottles, filled up, with dozens of similar items, the interstices between the casts, and connected the removal of any one thing that was wanted from the shelves, with the invariable catastrophe of knocking down eight or ten other things that were not.

Frameless pictures in every stage of incompleteness, sketches of all sizes, and prints ancient and modern, decorated the walls in just as haphazard a way as the casts decorated the shelves. The pictures hung awry, for the most part by single strings depending from nails dotted about

at various elevations. The sketches and prints were knocked up anyhow with tacks, in any places where there was room for them.

The larger works of art comprised, of course, representations of an Italian peasant woman decorated for a Festa; of a brown-complexioned patriarch with a large white beard; of a rocky landscape with steam and cascade; of a picturesque beggar-boy, grinning and holding out his hand (not finished) for a halfpenny; of a female head looking up, and of a dog's head looking down. Also, there were two small copies from Rubens, and one large copy from Titian: there was a print from Raphael, a print from Hogarth, a print from Teniers, among the dozens of engravings stuck against the walls. Over the fire-place hung a rusty breastplate, a dagger, and a piece of medieval plate; and all round the skirting-board, at irregular intervals, were placed piles of dirty old canvases, three or four deep, with their faces turned to the wall.

Immediately over the chimney-piece, the blank space was covered closely and crookedly with

writing in white, black, and red chalk. Addresses of new models, and appointments with old models, short quotations from the poets, memoranda of evening engagements and of domestic necessities, painting recipes, and hasty personal sentiments on art, were the subjects principally treated of on the curious substitute for a pocket diary used by Mr. Blyth. Perused at hazard in a horizontal direction, no matter whether high or low, any one line of the half-illegible writing above the chimney-piece would be found to read something in this way:—

“Daniel Sulsh, athletic model with beard, 5, Cranberry Court, High Holborn.”—“Amelia Bibby, to sit for the Genius of Discovery in my ‘Columbus,’ at 10, Wednesday.”—“How happy is the blameless vestal’s lot! Pope.”—“Melpomene Society’s *Conversazione*, 8 o’clock, Friday.”—“Order ginger beer, and get hair cut.”—“Try copal thinned with turpentine; paint next sky with linseed oil, and don’t forget that verdigris is a bad colour to stand.”—“I consider Michael Angelo the most glorious creature that ever lived.—V. Blyth.”

The most striking articles of furniture in the studio were two large easels placed at either extremity of the room ; each supporting a picture of considerable size, covered over for the present with a pair of sheets which looked wofully in want of washing. There was a painting-stand with quantities of shallow little drawers, some too full to open, others again too full to shut ; there was a movable platform to put sitters on, covered with red cloth much disguised in dust ; there was a small square table of new deal, and a large round table of dilapidated rosewood, both laden with sketch-books, portfolios, dog's eared sheets of drawing paper, tin pots, scattered brushes palette-knives, rags variously defiled by paint and oil, pencils, chalks, port-crayons—the whole smelling powerfully at all points of turpentine.

Finally, there were chairs in plenty, no one of which, however, at all resembled the other. In one corner, stood a mouldy antique chair with a high back, and a basin of dirty water on the seat. By the side of the fire-place a cheap straw chair of the beehive pattern was tilted over against a dining-room chair, with a horse-hair cushion.

Before the largest of the two pictures, and hard by a portable flight of steps, stood a rickety office-stool. On the platform for sitters a modern easy chair, with the cover in tatters, invited all models to picturesque repose. Close to the rosewood table was placed a rocking-chair, and between the legs of the deal table were huddled together a camp-stool and a hassock. In short, every remarkable variety of the illustrious family of Seats was represented in one corner or another of Mr. Blyth's painting-room.

All the surplus small articles which shelves, tables, and chairs were unable to accommodate, reposed in comfortable confusion on the floor. One half at least of a pack of cards seemed to be scattered about in this way. A shirt-collar, three gloves, a boot, a shoe, and half a slipper; a silk stocking, and a pair of worsted muffetees; three old play bills rolled into a ball; a pencil-case, a paper knife, a tooth powder-box without a lid, and a superannuated black beetle trap turned bottom upwards, assisted in forming part of the heterogeneous collection of rubbish strewed about the studio floor. And worse than all—as tending to

show that the painter absolutely enjoyed his own disorderly habits—Mr. Blyth had jocosely desecrated his art, by making it imitate litter where, in all conscience, there was real litter enough already. Just in the way of any body entering the room, he had painted, on the bare floor, exact representations of a new quill pen and a very expensive looking sable brush, lying all ready to be trodden upon by entering feet. Fresh visitors constantly attested the skilfulness of these imitations by involuntarily stooping to pick up the illusive pen and brush; Mr. Blyth always enjoying the discomfiture and astonishment of every new victim, as thoroughly as if the practical joke had been a perfectly new one on each successive occasion.

Such was the interior condition of the painting-room, after the owner had inhabited it for a period of little more than two months!

The church-clock of the suburb has just struck ten, when quick light steps approach the studio door. A gentleman enters—trips gaily over the imitative pen and brush—and, walking up to the fire, begins to warm his back at it, looking about-

him rather absently, and whistling "Drops of Brandy" in the minor key. This gentleman is Mr. Valentine Blyth.

He looks under forty, but is really a little over fifty. His face is round and rosy, and not marked by a single wrinkle in any part of it. He has large sparkling black eyes; wears neither whiskers, beard, nor moustache; keeps his thick curly black hair rather too closely cut; and has a briskly comical kindness of expression in his face, which it is not easy to contemplate for the first time without smiling at him. He is tall and stout, always wears very tight trowsers, and generally keeps his wristbands turned up over the cuffs of his coat. All his movements are quick and fidgetty. He appears to walk principally on his toes; and seems always on the point of beginning to dance, or jump, or run whenever he moves about, either in or out of doors. When he speaks he has an odd habit of ducking his head suddenly, and looking at the person whom he addresses over his shoulder. These, and other little personal peculiarities of a like nature, all contribute to make him exactly

that sort of man whom everybody shakes hands with, and nobody bows to, on a first introduction.

Men instinctively choose him to be the recipient of a joke, girls to be the male confidant of all flirtations which they like to talk about, children to be their petitioner for the pardon of a fault, or the reward of a half-holiday. On the other hand, he is decidedly unpopular among that large class of Englishmen, whose only topics of conversation are public nuisances and political abuses; for he resolutely looks at everything on the bright side, and cannot even be made to understand the difference between a Liberal Conservative and a Moderate Whig! Men of business habits think him a fool: intellectual women with independent views cite him triumphantly as a capital specimen of the inferior male sex. And, in truth, apart from his art (in which he cannot fairly be said to excel) he certainly would appear to have no particular mission in life—except to figure in poor painters' subscription lists; to be blessed inveterately by street beggars; and to be followed home at night by every stray dog who may happen to meet with him.

CHAPTER III.

MR. VALENTINE BLYTH.

MR. BLYTH'S history, though offering nothing very extraordinary as a whole, is, nevertheless, in some of its aspects, rather a remarkable one.

In the first place, neither his father, nor his mother, nor any relation of theirs, on either side, had ever practised the Art of Painting, or had ever derived any special pleasure from the contemplation of pictures. They were all respectable commercial people of the steady fund-holding old school, who lived exclusively within their own circle; and had never so much as spoken to a live artist or author in the whole course of their lives. The City-world in which Valentine's boyhood was passed, was as destitute of art influences of any kind as if it had been situated on the coast of Greenland; and yet, to the astonishment

of everybody, the lad was always drawing and painting in his own rude way, at every leisure hour—was always longing to get into the Academy Schools—and was always firm in his determination to be a painter, whenever his future prospects were talked over round the family fireside.

Old Mr. Blyth was, as might be expected, seriously disappointed and amazed at the strange direction taken by his son's inclinations. No one (including Valentine himself) could ever trace them back to any recognisable source; but everyone could observe plainly enough that they grew resolutely with the boy's growth, and that there was no hope of successfully opposing them by fair means of any kind. Seeing this, the old gentleman, like a wise man, at last made a virtue of necessity; and, giving way to his son, entered him, under strong commercial protest, as a student in the Schools of the Royal Academy.

Here Valentine remained, working industriously, until his twenty-first birthday. On that occasion, old Mr. Blyth had a little serious talk with him about his prospects in life. In the

course of this conversation, the young man was informed that a rich merchant uncle was ready to take him into partnership; and that his father was equally ready to start him in business with his whole share, as one of three children, in the comfortable inheritance acquired for the family by the head of the well-known City house of Blyth and Company. If Valentine consented to this arrangement, his fortune was secured, and he might ride in his carriage before he was thirty. If, on the other hand, he still persisted in becoming a painter, his father, being convinced that the pursuit of Art offered the most uncertain of all resources, would exceedingly lament the choice he had made; but would not on that account absolutely oppose it; and would never, whatever happened, refer to it disparagingly on any future occasion.

Having said thus much, the generous old gentleman added, that if his son really chose to fling away a fortune, he should not be pinched for means to carry on his studies. The interest of the inheritance to come to him on his father's death should be paid quarterly to him during his

father's lifetime : the annual independence thus secured to the young painter, under any circumstances, being calculated as amounting to a little over four hundred pounds a year.

Valentine was not deficient in gratitude. He thanked his father with tears in his eyes ; took a day to consider what he should do, though his mind was quite made up about his choice beforehand ; and then, as the reader has anticipated, persisted in his first determination ; throwing away the present certainty of becoming a wealthy man, for the sake of the future chance of turning out a great painter.

If he had really possessed genius, there would have been nothing very remarkable in this part of his history, so far ; but, having nothing of the kind, holding not the smallest spark of the great creative fire in his whole mental composition, surely there was something extraordinary and unaccountable, something very discouraging to contemplate, in the spectacle of a man resolutely determining, in spite of adverse home circumstances and strong home temptations, to abandon all those paths in life, along which he might have walked fairly

abreast with his fellows, for the one other path in which he was predestined by Nature to be always left behind by the way. Do the announcing angels, whose mission it is to whisper of greatness to great spirits, ever catch the infection of fallibility from their intercourse with mortals? Do the voices which said truly to Shakspeare, to Raphael, and to Mozart, in their youth-time,—You are chosen to be gods in this world, ever speak wrongly to souls which they are not ordained to approach? It may be so. There are men enough in all countries whose lives would seem to prove it—whose deaths have not contradicted it.

But even to victims such as these, sacrificed as they are to a delusion which seems, on first sight, to be the most fatal offspring of all mortal fallibilities; there are pleasant resting-places on the thorny way, and flashes of sunlight now and then, to make the cloudy prospect beautiful, though only for a little while. It is not all misfortune and disappointment to the man who is mentally unworthy of a great intellectual vocation, so long as he is morally worthy of it; so long as he can pursue it honestly, patiently, and affectionately,

for its own dear sake. Let him work, though ever so obscurely, in this spirit towards his labour; and he shall find the labour itself its own exceeding great reward. In that reward lives the divine consolation, ever gentle and ever true, which, though Fame turn her back on him contemptuously, and Affluence pass over un pitying to the other side of the way, shall still pour oil upon all his wounds, and take him quietly and tenderly to the hard journey's end. To this one exhaustless solace, which the work, no matter of what degree, can yield always to earnest workers, the man who has succeeded, and the man who has failed, can turn alike, as to a common mother; the one, for refuge from envy, from hatred, from misrepresentation, from all the sorest evils which even the thriving child of Fame is heir to; the other, from neglect, from disappointment, from ridicule, from all the petty tyrannies which the pining bondman of Obscurity is fated to undergo.

Thus it was with Valentine. He had sacrificed a fortune to his Art; and his Art—in the world's eye at least—had given to him nothing in return.

Yet, for all that, he could not have loved it more dearly, worked at it more hopefully, believed in it more proudly and faithfully, if the Royal Academy had chosen him for President, and the Queen had tapped him on the shoulder with a sword and said, "Rise Sir Valentine Blyth."

He was certainly placed far out of the reach of poverty by his four hundred pounds a year ; and was consequently spared all those last, bitterest miseries, which might sooner or later have overwhelmed any other man, less fortunately circumstanced, who occupied his humble position in the Art. But this very good fortune of Mr. Blyth's was counterpoised by an accompanying disadvantage which hung long and oppressively on the opposite side of the scale. Friends and relatives who had not scrupled, on being made acquainted with his choice of a vocation, to call it in question, and thereby to commit that worst and most universal of all human impertinences, which consists in telling a man to his face, by the plainest possible inference, that others are better able than he is himself to judge what calling in life is fittest and worthiest for him ; friends and

relatives who thus upbraided Valentine for his refusal to accept the partnership in his uncle's house, affected, on discovering that he made no public progress whatever in Art, to believe that he was simply an idle fellow, who knew that his father's liberality placed him beyond the necessity of working for his bread ; and who had taken up the pursuit of painting as a mere amateur amusement to occupy his leisure hours. To a man who laboured like poor Blyth, with the steadiest industry and the highest aspirations, such whispered calumnies as these were of all mortifications the most cruel, of all earthly insults the hardest to bear.

Still he worked on patiently, never losing faith or hope, because he never lost the love of his Art, or the enjoyment of pursuing it, irrespective of results however disheartening. Like most other men of his slight intellectual calibre, the works he produced were various, if nothing else. He tried the florid style, and the severe style ; he was by turns devotional, allegorical, historical, sentimental, humourous. At one time, he abandoned figure-painting altogether, and took to

landscape; now producing conventional studies from Nature,—and now, again, revelling in poetical compositions, which might have hung undetected in many a collection as doubtful specimens of Berghem, or Claude.

But whatever department of the Art Valentine tried to excel in, the same unhappy destiny seemed always in reserve for each completed effort. For years and years, his pictures pleaded hard for admission at the Academy doors; and were invariably (and not unfairly, it must be confessed) refused even the worst places on the walls of the Exhibition rooms. Season after season he still bravely struggled on, never depressed, never hopeless while he was before his easel, until at last the day of reward—how long and painfully wrought for!—actually arrived. A small picture of a very insignificant subject—being only a kitchen “interior,” with a sleek cat on a dresser, stealing milk from the tea-tray during the servant’s absence—was benevolently marked “doubtful” by the Hanging Committee; was thereupon kept in reserve, in case it might happen to fit any forgotten place near the floor—

did fit such a place—and was really hung up, as Mr. Blyth's little unit of a contribution to the one thousand and odd works exhibited to the public, that year, by the Royal Academy.

But Valentine's triumph did not end here. His picture of the treacherous cat stealing the household milk—entitled, by way of appealing jocosely to the strong Protestant interest, "The Jesuit in the Family,"—was really sold to an Art-Union prize-holder. This enlightened patron of the Fine Arts was a publican. He had drawn ten pounds out of the great lottery; and being economically determined to have the largest work he could buy for his money, went about with a carpenter's rule in his hand, measuring all the ten pound pictures for sale. "The Jesuit in the Family" was a prodigious bargain in this point of view, so the Art-Union Mecænas patronised and purchased it accordingly.

Once furnished with a ten-pound note won by his own brush, Valentine, from that time forth, gaily set all disparaging opinions and all impudently-advising friends at defiance. He indulged in the most extravagant anticipations of future

celebrity and future wealth; and proved, recklessly enough, that he believed as firmly as any other visionary in the wildest dreams of his own imagination, by marrying, and setting up quite a grand establishment, on the strength of the brilliant success which had been achieved by "The Jesuit in the Family."

He had been for some time past engaged to the lady, who had now become Mrs. Valentine Blyth. She was the youngest of eight sisters, who formed part of the family of a poor engraver, and who, in the absence of any mere money qualifications, were all rich alike in the ownership of most magnificent Christian names. Mrs. Blyth was called Lavinia-Ada; and hers was by far the humblest name to be found among the whole sisterhood. Valentine's relations all objected strongly to this match, not only on account of the bride's poverty, but for another and a very serious reason, which events soon proved to be but too well founded.

Lavinia had suffered long and severely, as a child, from a bad spinal malady. Constant attention, and such medical assistance as her

father could afford to employ had, it was said, successfully combated the disorder; and the girl grew up, prettier than any of her sisters, and apparently almost as strong as the healthiest of them. Old Mr. Blyth, however, on hearing that his son was now just as determined to become a married man, as he had formerly been to become a painter, thought it advisable to make certain inquiries about the young lady's constitution; and addressed them, with characteristic caution, to the family doctor, at a private interview.

The result of this conference was far from being satisfactory. The doctor was suspiciously careful not to commit himself: he said that he *hoped* the spine was no longer in danger of being affected; but that he could not conscientiously express himself as feeling quite sure about it. Having repeated these discouraging words to his son, old Mr. Blyth delicately and considerately, but very plainly, asked Valentine, whether, after what he had heard, he still honestly thought that he would be consulting his own happiness, or the lady's happiness either, by marrying her at all? or, at least, by marrying her at a time when the doctor

could not venture to say, that the poor girl might not be even yet in danger of becoming an invalid for life ?

Valentine, as usual, persisted at first in looking exclusively at the bright side of the question ; and made light of the doctor's authority accordingly. But being pressed by his father to view the matter in its worst, as well as in its best aspects, he answered resolutely that, whatever happened, he was determined to perform his promise to Lavinia, at the time which they had already appointed for their marriage.

"Lavvie and I love each other dearly," said Valentine with a little trembling in his voice, but with perfect firmness of manner. "I hope in God that what you seem to fear will never happen ; but even if it should, I shall never repent having married her, for I know that I am just as ready to be her nurse as to be her husband. I am willing to take her in sickness and in health, as the Prayer-Book says. In my home she would have such constant attention paid to her wants and comforts, as she could not have at her father's, with his large family and

his poverty, poor fellow ! And this is reason enough, I think, for my marrying her, even if the worst should take place. But I always have hoped for the best, as you know, father : and I mean to go on hoping for poor Lavvie, just the same as ever ! ”

What could old Mr. Blyth, what could any man of heart and honour, oppose to such an answer as this ? Nothing. The marriage took place ; and Valentine’s father tried hard, and not altogether vainly, to feel as sanguine about future results as Valentine himself.

For several months—how short the time seemed, when they looked back on it in after years !—the happiness of the painter and his wife more than fulfilled the brightest hopes which they had formed as lovers. As for the doctor’s cautious words, they were hardly remembered now ; or, if recalled, were recalled only to be laughed over. But the time of tears, and bitter grief, which had been appointed, though they knew it not, came inexorably, even while they were still lightly jesting at all medical authority round the painter’s fireside. Lavinia caught a

bad cold. The cold turned to rheumatism, to fever, then to general debility, then to nervous attacks—each one of these disorders, being really but so many false appearances, under which the horrible spinal malady was treacherously and slowly advancing in disguise.

When the first positive symptoms appeared, old Mr. Blyth acted with all his accustomed generosity towards his son. "My purse is yours, Valentine," said he; "open it when you like; and let Lavinia, while there is a chance for her, have the same advice and the same remedies as if she was the greatest duchess in the land." The old man's affectionate advice was affectionately followed. The most renowned doctors in England prescribed for Lavinia; everything that science and incessant attention could do, was done; but the terrible disease still baffled remedy after remedy, advancing surely and irresistibly, until at last the doctors themselves lost all hope. So far as human science could foretell events, Mrs. Blyth, in the opinion of all her medical advisers, was doomed for the rest of her life never to rise again from the bed on

which she lay ; except perhaps to be sometimes moved to the sofa, or, in the event of some favourable reaction, to be wheeled about occasionally in an invalid chair.

What the shock of this intelligence was, both to husband and wife, no one ever knew ; they nobly kept it a secret even from each other. Mrs. Blyth was the first to recover courage and calmness. She begged, as an especial favour, that Valentine would seek consolation, where she knew he must find it sooner or later, by going back to his studio, and resuming his old familiar labours, which had been suspended from the time when her illness had originally declared itself.

On the first day when, in obedience to her wishes, he sat before his picture again—the half-finished picture from which he had been separated for so many months—on that first day, when the friendly occupation of his life seemed suddenly to have grown strange to him ; when his brush wandered idly among the colours, when his tears dropped fast on the palette every time he looked down on it, when he tried hard to

work as usual, though only for half an hour, only on simple background places in the composition; and still the brush made false touches, and still the tints would not mingle as they should, and still the same words, repeated over and over again, would burst from his lips: "Oh, poor Lavvie! oh, poor, dear, dear Lavvie!"—even then, the spirit of that beloved art, which he had always followed so humbly and so faithfully, was true to its divine mission, and comforted and upheld him at the last bitterest moment, when he laid down his palette in despair.

While he was still hiding his face before the very picture which he and his wife had once innocently and secretly glorified together, in those happy days of its beginning that were never to come again, the sudden thought of consolation revived his heart, and showed him how he might adorn all his after-life with the deathless beauty of a pure and noble purpose. Thenceforth, his vague dreams of fame, and of rich men wrangling with each other for the possession of his pictures, took the second place in his mind; and, in their

stead, sprang up the new resolution that he would win independently, with his own brush, no matter at what sacrifice of pride and ambition, the means of surrounding his sick wife with all those luxuries and refinements which his own little income did not enable him to obtain, and which he shrank with instinctive delicacy from accepting as presents bestowed by his father's generosity. Here was the consoling purpose which robbed affliction of half its bitterness already, and bound him and his art together by a bond more sacred than any that had united them before. In the very hour when this thought came to him, he rose without a pang to turn the great historical composition, from which he had once hoped so much, with its face to the wall, and set himself to finish an unpretending little "Study" of a cottage courtyard, which he was certain of selling to a picture-dealing friend. The first approach to happiness which he had known for a long, long time past, was on the evening of that day, when he went upstairs to sit with Lavinia; and, keeping secret his purpose of the morning, made the sick woman smile in spite of her sufferings, by asking her how

she should like to have her room furnished, if she were the lady of a great lord, instead of being only the wife of Mr. Valentine Blyth.

Then came the happy day when the secret was revealed, and afterwards the pleasant years when poor Mrs. Blyth's most splendid visions of aristocratic luxury were all gradually realised through her husband's exertions in his profession. But for his wife's influence, Valentine would have been in danger of abandoning High Art and Classical Landscape altogether, for cheap portrait-painting, cheap copying, and cheap studies of Still Life. But Mrs. Blyth, bedridden as she was, contrived to preserve all her old influence over the labours of the Studio; and would ask for nothing new, and receive nothing new, in her room, except on condition that her husband was to paint at least one picture of High Art every year, for the sake (as she proudly said) of "asserting his intellect and his reputation in the eyes of the public." Accordingly, Mr. Blyth's time was pretty equally divided between the production of great unsaleable "compositions," which were always hung near the ceiling in the Exhibition, and of small marketable

commodities, which were as invariably hung near the floor.

Valentine's average earnings from his art, though humble enough in amount, amply sufficed to fulfil the affectionate purpose for which, to the last farthing, they were rigorously set aside. "Lavvie's Drawing-Room" (this was Mr. Blyth's name for his wife's bed-room) really looked as bright and beautiful as any royal chamber in the universe. The rarest flowers, the prettiest gardens under glass, bowls with gold and silver fish in them, a small aviary of birds, an Æolian harp to put on the window-sill in summer time, some of Valentine's best drawings from the old masters, prettily framed proof-impressions of engravings done by Mrs. Blyth's father, curtains and hangings of the tenderest colour and texture, inlaid tables, and delicately-carved book-cases, were among the different objects of refinement and beauty which, in the course of years, Mr. Blyth's industry had enabled him to accumulate for his wife's pleasure. No one but himself ever knew what he had sacrificed in labouring to gain these things. The heartless people whose portraits he

had painted, and whose impertinences he had patiently submitted to; the stingy bargainers who had treated him like a low tradesman; the dastardly men of business who had disgraced their order by taking mean advantage of his simplicity; how hardly and cruelly such insect natures of this world had often dealt with that noble heart! how despicably they had planted their small gad-fly stings in the great soul which it was never permitted to them to subdue!

No! not once to subdue, not once to tarnish! All petty humiliations were forgotten in one look at "Lavvie's Drawing-Room;" all stain of insolent words vanished from Valentine's memory in the atmosphere of the Studio. Never was a more superficial judgment pronounced than when his friends said that he had thrown away his whole life, because he had chosen a vocation in which he could win no public success. Short-sighted observers! they could look at the subject only within this one narrow range of vision; they failed altogether to see what his choice had won for him, in place of that success which they

worshipped as if it comprised the Alpha and Omega of merit in itself.

'The lad's earliest instincts had indeed led him truly, after all. The art to which he had devoted himself was the only earthly pursuit that could harmonise as perfectly with all the eccentricities as with all the graces of his character, that could mingle happily with every joy, tenderly with every grief belonging to the quiet, simple, and innocent life, which, employ him anyhow, it was in his original nature to lead. But for this protecting art, under what prim disguises, amid what foggy social climates of class conventionality, would the worlds clerical, legal, mercantile, military, naval, or dandy, have extinguished this man, if any one of them had caught him in its snares! Where would then have been his frolicsome enthusiasm that nothing could dispirit, his inveterate oddities of thought, speech, and action, which made all his friends laugh at him and bless him in the same breath; his affections, so manly in their firmness, so womanly in their tenderness, so childlike in their frank fearless confidence, that dreaded neither ridicule

on the one side, nor deception on the other? Where, and how, would all these characteristics have vanished, but for his art—but for the abiding spirit, ever present to preserve their vital warmth against the outer and earthy cold? The wisest of Valentine's friends, who shook their heads disparagingly whenever his name was mentioned, were at least wise enough in *their* generation never to ask themselves such embarrassing questions as these.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PAINTER AND HIS PALETTE.

WHILE we have been looking over his past life—now past for many years—Mr. Blyth has moved away from the Studio fire-place, and is about to begin work for the day.

Still whistling, he walks towards an earthen pipkin half-full of water, placed in one corner of the painting-room, and takes from it a little china palette, which looks absurdly small as a ministering agent to the progress of the two large pictures on the high and sturdy easels. He has indolently left on this palette the whole of yesterday's paint. The water, however, has prevented it from hardening, and has therefore rendered it easy of removal by the palette-knife. Looking round the room for some waste paper to wipe off the brimstone-and-treacle-coloured com-

pound which the first sweep of his blade has scraped up, Mr. Blyth's eyes happen to light first on the painting-table, and on four or five notes which lie scattered over it.

These he thinks will suit his purpose as well as anything else, so he takes up the notes, but before making use of them, reads their contents over for the second time—partly by way of caution, partly through a dawdling habit, which men of his absent disposition are always too ready to contract. Three of these letters happen to be in the same scrambling, blotted handwriting. They are none of them very long, and are the production of a former acquaintance of the reader's, who has somewhat altered in height and personal appearance during the course of the last fourteen years. Here is the first of the notes which Valentine is now reading:—

“Dear Blyth,—It's all over with me. The governor says Theatres are the Devil's Houses, and I must be home by eleven o'clock. I'm sure I never did anything wrong at a Theatre, which I might not have done just the same anywhere else; unless laughing over a good play

is one of the *national sins* he's always talking about. But I'll be hanged if I can stand it much longer, even for my mother's sake! You are my only friend. I shall come and see you to-morrow, so mind and be at home. How I wish I was an artist! Yours ever, Z. THORPE, JUN."

Shaking his head and smiling at the same time, Mr. Blyth finishes this letter—drops a perfect puddle of dirty paint and turpentine in the middle, over the words "national sins," throws the paper into the fire—and goes on to note number two:—

"Dear Blyth,—I couldn't come yesterday, because of another row, and my mother crying about it, of course. You remember the old row, when I was at school, about Teddy Millichap and me smoking cigars, and how my pocket-money was stopped, and I pawned my new silver watch, and was near being expelled because it wasn't gentlemanlike? Well, this is just the same sort of row over again. The governor said he smelt tobacco smoke at morning prayers. It was my coat, which I forgot to air at the fire the night before; and he found it out, and

said he wouldn't have me smoke, because it led to dissipation, and I told him (which is true) that lots of parsons smoked. There was such a row ! I wish you visited at our house, and could come and say a word on my side ; for I am perfectly wretched, and have had all my cigars taken away from me. Yours truly, Z. THORPE, JUN."

"Catch me going near your vinegar-cruet of a father, Mister Zack !" says Valentine to himself, making a wry face while he deposits a moist lump of "lamp-black," streaked with "lemon-yellow," upon the fair white paper of the second note—tossing it into the fire afterwards, as if it were viciously burning his fingers by anticipation.

A third note is required before the palette can be scraped clean. Mr. Blyth reads the contents rather gravely on this occasion ; rapidly plastering his last morsels of waste paint upon the paper as he goes on, until at length it looks as if it had been thoroughly well peppered with all the colours of the rainbow.

Zack's third letter of complaint certainly promised serious domestic tribulation for the ruling power at Baregrove Square :—

"Dear Blyth,—I have been bullied by my father, and coaxed by my mother; and the end of it is, that I have given in, at least for the present. I told the governor about my wanting to be an artist, and about your saying that I had a good notion of drawing, and an eye for a likeness; but I might just as well have talked to one of your easels. He said the profession was a dangerous one"—("And *I* say it is'nt," muttered Mr. Blyth to himself)—"and led to all sorts of profligacy;"—"It doesn't!" said Valentine, indignantly spotting the paper with Prussian blue)—"and that artists in general led very debauched lives."—"That's a vile lie!" cried Mr. Blyth, poking the top of his palette-knife clean through the note in a rage)—"I denied it all, of course, point-blank,"—"Well done, Zack!"—"And was savagely rowed for my pains."—"Never mind that, you spoke the truth!"—"It ended, as I said before, in my giving in on mother's account. And here I have been, for the last three weeks, at a Tea Broker's office in the city in consequence. The governor and his friends say it's a good opening for me, and talk about the respectability

of commercial pursuits. I don't want to be respectable, and I hate commercial pursuits. What the deuce is the good of forcing me into a merchant's office, when I can't say my Multiplication Table? Ask my mother about that: she'll tell you! Only fancy me going round tea warehouses in filthy Jewish places like St. Mary-Axe, to take samples, with a blue bag to carry them about in; and a dirty junior clerk who wears Blucher boots and cleans his pen in his hair, to teach me how to fold up parcels! Isn't it enough to make a fellow's blood boil to think of it? I can't go on, and I won't go on in this way! Mind you're at home to-morrow; I'm coming to speak to you about how I'm to begin learning to be an artist. The junior clerk is going to do all my sampling work for me in the morning; and we are to meet in the afternoon, after I have come away from you, at a chop-house; and then go back to the office as if we had been together all day, just as usual. Don't be afraid of it's being discovered. I can bribe the inky-haired little devil with the Bluchers to the strictest secrecy, by treating him to juicy steaks and treacly porter. Ever

yours, Z. THORPE, JUN.—P.S. My mind's made up : if the worst comes to the worst, I shall bolt from home."

"Oh, dear me ! oh dear ! dear me !" says Valentine, mournfully rubbing his palette clean with a bit of rag. "What will it all end in, I wonder. Old Thorpe's going just the way, with his obstinate severity, to drive Zack to something desperate. If my own dear, kind father, had had the management of him, what a different boy he would have been ! Coming here to-morrow, he says ?" continued Mr. Blyth, taking up a tin tube, and dreamily squeezing white paint out of it, which dropped slowly on his palette in little worm-like folds. "Coming to-morrow ! He never dates his notes ; but I suppose, as this one came last night, he means to-day. I don't know how to advise him for the best, I'm sure—he's such a queer, flighty fellow. Confound the Vandyck brown ; I'm always losing that particular colour ! Where can it have got to ?"

Not finding the Vandyck brown, Mr. Blyth goes on to the next available pigment, which he can extricate from the disordered interior of his

painting-box—then stops again to hunt for another lost tube of colour ; the top of which, when he finds it, won't come off, and the bottom of which bursts in his hand, letting the paint out on his fingers instead of his palette. Having repaired this disaster, Valentine, before proceeding further with his preparations for the day's work, determines to refresh himself by a look at one of his pictures. He throws the sheet off the smallest of the two, and discloses a Classical Landscape.

The chief aim of the Muses who preside over Classic Art—whether it be ancient or modern, whether it take the form of Poetry, Painting, or Music—seems to be to preserve their artificial dignity as Goddesses, by banishing their natural charms as Women ; to live even with their professed admirers on the most stately and formal terms ; and to keep the world at large thoroughly well away from them by improving, informing, and attracting as few people as possible by any recognisably useful, truthful, or graceful means. When, for example, the Muse who presides over the Classic Drama, condescends to appeal icily to us from afar off, and writes a play, she selects a

suicide—say Cato—for hero. She keeps him incessantly engaged in talking patriotism and philosophy; represents him as always moving about uncomfortably in Halls, Porticoes, Senate-houses, and Squares; and never lets us hear a word from his lips of any of the universal human subjects which the poor wretch must have talked about, when he ate his bit of classical dinner, when he dawdled out into the Forum on idle days to hear the news, or when he started off constitutionally for a brisk Roman walk.

And, again, when the Classic Muse resolves to paint a picture of the pastoral hilarity of primeval times, is it not always her principle to make men and women as unlike human nature as possible? Her happy female revellers must always exhibit an incredibly ugly straight profile line from the top of the forehead to the tip of the nose; and must generally be made to express ecstasy by hopping on one leg—apparently in a hurricane, judging by the frightful manner in which their petticoats and hair are blown about them on these occasions. And as for the jovial male companions of the ladies, are they not always monsters with

tawny red skins, mottled outrageously with lumps of knotty muscle? Are they not continually more or less drunk?—continually more or less beastly and ridiculous in their antics? Must we believe such representations to be poetically suggestive of life among the simple inhabitants of a young world? Of course we must; for it is the Classic Muse who has done them!

Or, lastly, when this same Classic Muse appeals to our ears, and writes a symphony, what immense pains she takes in that, as in other things, to avoid being popularly and immediately pleasing! She combines all her instruments in a general conspiracy against one weakly little atom of a tune (frequently not her own property), which is always trying to make itself heard, and always being bellowed down sternly for its pains; until, at last, assailed by screeching fiddles, shouting horns, grunting double basses, and treacherously-mellifluous flutes, it expires, faintly piping, in a storm of furious fugue, after a gallant but vain struggle for existence which has lasted for more than half an hour.

Now, in regard to the landscape development

of Classic Art, if Mr. Blyth had done nothing else, he had at least achieved the great end of reminding nobody of anything simple, familiar, or pleasing to them in nature. In the foreground were the three lanky ruined columns, the dancing Bacchantes, the musing philosopher, the mahogany-coloured vegetation, and the bosky and branchless trees, with which we have all been familiar, from our youth upwards, in "classical compositions." Down the middle of the scene ran that wonderful river, which is always rippling with the same regular waves; and always bearing onward the same capsizable galleys, with the same vermilion and blue revellers striking lyres on the deck. On the bank where there was most room for it, appeared our old, old friend, the architectural City, which nobody could possibly live in; and which is composed of nothing but temples, towers, monuments, flights of steps, and bewildering rows of pillars. In the distance, our favourite blue mountains were as blue and as peaky as ever, on Valentine's canvas; and our generally-approved pale yellow sun was still disfigured by the same attack of aërial jaundice, from which he has

suffered ever since classical compositions first forbade him to take refuge from the sight behind a friendly cloud.

Before this picture, which is very nearly finished, Mr. Blyth stands rapt in approving contemplation ; now dropping his head a little on one side, and now on the other ; now retreating backwards to take in the general effect ; now advancing again, and isolating bit after bit of the scene, by holding two of his fingers before other bits, so as to enjoy it successively in separate parts. He has put two fingers over the philosopher, to see how the Bacchantes look without him, when a shrill and impatient mewling, outside the studio door, attracts his attention.

“ Bless my soul ! ” says Valentine, (who has an inveterate habit of talking to himself), “ there’s ‘ Snooks ’ wanting to come in ! She was only confined last night. I wonder what the servants will say to her getting back into the painting-room already ? ”

Mr. Blyth opens the door while he is speaking ; and a small black cat, with white toes, a melancholy-looking white muzzle, and a kitten in her

mouth, enters methodically—walks straight up to the fireplace—deposits her kitten on the rug—and, lying down beside it, instantly begins to purr as loud as she possibly can.

“Why, you little wretch!” says Mr. Blyth, poking “Snooks” gently behind the ear with the padded end of that light cane which artists rest against their pictures to steady the hand while painting, and which is technically termed a Mahl-Stick,—“Why you little wretch! when are you going to leave off kittinging? Let me see: you’re not a very old cat yet; you’ve had six litters of four at a time, (four times six are twenty-four) and five litters of three at a time. Three times five’s fifteen, and ten’s twenty-five, and four—no, and ten—or, stop, two tens, twenty; and four—no, fifteen—well, at any rate, it *must* be forty; of course it must be forty, though I can’t exactly make it out. Oh Snooks! Snooks! you would have been the mother of a family of forty children, by this time, if we hadn’t taken to drowning them!”

Puss, thus apostrophised, rolls luxuriously over on her back; elevates her four white toes in the

air; and looks up, indolently impudent, with half-closed green eyes, at Mr. Blyth. No account of that gentleman's household could possibly pretend to be complete, if it did not include the cat. She was literally a member of the family. She lived with them, ate with them, followed them about the house like a dog, performed all sorts of tricks under Mr. Blyth's direction, and was on perfectly friendly terms with the whole circle of his acquaintance. She had been first derisively called "Snooks" by Mr. Zachary Thorpe, junior, which designation had been immediately adopted by Valentine, who said he highly approved of a short, familiar English name, for a small, familiar English animal. Mrs. Blyth, inheriting her father's fondness for fine names, suggested that the cat had better be called "Zerlina," but was outvoted by everybody, and puss became the comic "Snooks," instead of the sentimental "Zerlina," of the family, from that moment.

After playing with the cat for a minute or two longer, Valentine resumes the business of preparing his palette.

As the bee comes and goes irregularly from

flower to flower ; as the butterfly flutters in a zig-zag course from one sunny place on the garden wall to another ; or, as an old woman runs from wrong omnibus to wrong omnibus, at the Elephant and Castle, before she can discover the right one ; as a countryman blunders up one street, and down another, before he can find the way to his place of destination in London ; so does Mr. Blyth now come and go, flutter, run, and blunder in a mighty hurry about his studio, in search of missing colours which ought to be in his painting-box, but which are not to be found there. While he is still hunting through the room for the Vandyck brown, his legs come into collision with a large drawing-board, which, like everything else, is put in the wrong place.

“ Oh my shins ! ” cries Valentine, gently rubbing the affected parts. “ Oh my Vandyck brown ! where on earth can it be ? Stop a minute, though ! I declare I forgot about the Venus.”

The drawing-board, on which there is a blank sheet of paper stretched, seems to have reminded

Mr. Blyth of some duty connected with it. He places it against two chairs, in a good light ; then moves the portable steps up to one of the shelves with the casts on it, and removes the Venus de' Medici from under the eyes of Doctor Johnson ; knocking down, the moment he lifts her away, a lump of putty, a ball of string, and a number of old brushes. He then carries Venus's head and shoulders to the office stool, which he has previously moved opposite to the two chairs and the drawing-board. Having completed these preparations, and reviewed them critically with his head a little on one side, he goes back to the painting-box, and is just searching again among the tubes of colour, when the door of the studio opens, and a young lady enters.

She is dressed in very pretty, simple, Quaker-like attire. Her gown is of a light-grey colour, covered by a neat little black apron in front, and fastening round the throat over a frill collar. The sleeves of this dress are worn tight to the arm, and are terminated at the wrists by quaint-looking cuffs of antique lace, the only ornamental morsels of costume which she has on. It is

impossible to describe how deliciously soft, bright, fresh, pure, and delicate this young lady is, merely as an object to look at, contrasted with the dingy disorder of the studio-sphere through which she now moves. The keenest observers, beholding her as she at present appears, would detect nothing in her face or figure, her manner or her costume, in the slightest degree suggestive of impenetrable mystery, or incurable misfortune. And yet, she happens to be the very person at whom prying glances are directed, whenever she walks out; whose very existence is referred to by the neighbours with an invariable accompaniment of shrugs, sighs, and lamenting looks; and whose "case" is always compassionately designated as "a sad case," whenever it is brought forward—which is pretty often—in the course of conversation, at dinner-tables and tea-tables in the new suburb.

Socially, we may be all easily divided into two classes in this world—at least in the civilised part of it. If we are not the people whom others talk about, then we are sure to be the people who talk about others.

The young lady who had just entered Mr. Blyth's painting-room, belonged to the former order of human beings.

She was fated to be used as a constant subject of conversation by her fellow-creatures. Even her face alone—simply *as* a face—could not escape perpetual discussion; and that, too, among Valentine's friends, who all knew her well, and loved her dearly! It was the oddest thing in the world, but no one of them could ever agree with another (except on one point, to be presently mentioned), as to which of her personal attractions ought to be first selected for approval, or quoted as particularly asserting her claims to the admiration of all worshippers of beauty.

To take three or four instances of this. There was Mr. Gimble, the civil, hearty little picture-dealer, and a very good friend in every way to Valentine: there was Mr. Gimble, who stoutly declared that her principal charm was in her complexion, her fair, clear, wonderful complexion, which he would respectfully defy any artist alive to paint, let him try ever so hard, or be ever so great a man. Then came the Dowager

Countess of Brambledown, the frolicsome old aristocrat, who was generally believed to be "a little cracked;" who haunted Mr. Blyth's studio, after having once given him an order to paint her cockatoo, her rare China tea-service, and her favourite muff, all in one group; and who differed entirely from the little picture-dealer. "Fiddle-de-dee!" cried her ladyship, scornfully, on hearing Mr. Gimble's opinion quoted one day. "The man may know something about pictures, but he's evidently a perfect ass about women. Her complexion, indeed! I could make as good a complexion for myself (we old women are painters too, in our way, Blyth). Don't tell me about her complexion—it's her eyes! her incomparable blue eyes, which would have driven the young men of *my* time mad—mad, I give you my word of honour! Not a gentleman, sir, in my youthful days—and they *were* gentlemen then—but would have been too happy to run away with her for her eyes alone; and what's more, to have shot any man who said as much as 'Stop him!' Complexion, indeed, Mr. Gimble? I'll complexion you, next time I find my way into

your picture-gallery ! Take a pinch of snuff, Blyth ; and never repeat nonsense in my hearing again."

There was Mr. Bullivant, the enthusiastic young sculptor, with the mangy flow of flaxen hair, and the plump, waxy face ; who wrote poetry, and showed, by various sonnets, that he again differed completely about the young lady from the Dowager Countess of Brambledown and Mr. Gimble. This gentleman sang melodiously, on paper—using, by the way, a professional epithet—about her "chiselled mouth,"

"Which breathed of rapture and the balmy South."

He expatiated on

"Her lips sweet smiling at her dimpled chin,
Whose wealth of kisses gods might long to win—"

and much more to the same maudlin effect. In plain prose, the ardent Bullivant was all for the lower part of the young lady's face, and actually worried her, and Mr. Blyth, and everybody in the house, until he got leave to take a cast of it.

Lastly, there was Mrs. Blyth's father ; a meek,

modest, and aged man, with a continual cold in the head; who lived on marvellously to the utmost verge of human existence—as very poor men, with very large families, who would be much better out of this world than in it, very often do. There was this low-speaking, mildly-infirm, and perpetually-snuffing engraver, who, having once ventured to say in public that the young lady was “indeed a most charming person,” remarked, on being asked to state what he most admired in her, that he thought it was her hair, “which was of such a nice lightish-brown colour; and, perhaps, besides that, it might be the pleasant way in which she carried her head; and, indeed, having got so far, possibly he might be allowed to go lower, and refer to the shape of her shoulders, into the bargain. But his opinion (here he blushed crimson) was quite good for nothing in tasty matters of this kind, and ought, of course, to be apologised for as soon as it was uttered.” In speaking thus of his opinion, the worthy engraver certainly depreciated himself most unjustly: for, if the father of eight daughters cannot succeed in learning

(philoprogenitively speaking) how to be a good judge of women, what man can?

However, there was one point on which Mr. Gimble, Lady Brambledown, Mr. Bullivant, Mrs. Blyth's father, and hosts of friends besides, were all agreed without one discordant exception.

They unanimously asserted that the young lady's face was the nearest living approach they had ever seen to that immortal "Madonna" face, which has for ever associated the idea of beauty with the name of RAPHAEL. The resemblance struck everybody alike, even those who were but slightly conversant with pictures, the moment they saw her. Taken in detail, her features might be easily found fault with. Her eyes might be pronounced too large, her mouth too small, her nose not Grecian enough for some people's tastes. But the general effect of these features, the shape of her head and face, and especially her habitual expression, reminded all beholders at once and irresistibly of the image of softness, purity, and feminine gentleness, which has been engraven for ever on so many memories by the "Madonnas" of Raphael.

It was in consequence of this extraordinary resemblance, that her own English name of Mary had been, from the first, altered and Italianised by Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, and by all intimate friends, into "Madonna." One or two extremely strict and extremely imbecile people, captiously objected to any such familiar application of this name, as being open, in certain directions, to an imputation of irreverence. Mr. Blyth was not generally very quick at an answer; but, on this occasion, he had three answers ready before the objections were quite out of the objectors' mouths.

In the first place, he said, that he and his friends used the name only in an artist-sense, and only with reference to Raphael's pictures. In the next place, he produced an Italian dictionary, and showed that "Madonna" had a second meaning in the language, signifying simply and literally, "My lady." And, in conclusion, he proved historically, that "Madonna" had been used in the old times as a prefix to the names of Italian women; quoting, for example, "Madonna Pia," whom he happened to remember

just at that moment, from having once painted a picture of one of the scenes in her terrible story. These statements completely overthrew all objections; and the young lady was accordingly much better known in the painter's house as "Madonna" than as "Mary."

On now entering the studio, she walked up to Valentine, laid a hand lightly on each of his shoulders, and so lifted herself to him to be kissed on the forehead. Then she looked down on his palette, and observing that some colours were still missing from it, began to search for them directly in the painting-box. She found the lost Vandyck brown in a moment; and held it up before Mr. Blyth with a pretty, arch look of enquiry and triumph. He nodded, smiled, and held out his palette for her to put the colour on it herself. Having done this very neatly and delicately, she next turned towards the cat and kitten, with a merry look of astonishment in her soft clear eyes.

"Snooks" had her favourites in the house, and always expressed her excessive attachment to Madonna by uttering, whenever the young lady

touched her, an oddly-toned low cry,—a sort of quick, prolonged purr, which never greeted any other member of the family. Valentine had often tried to deceive the cat in the dark, and make her distinguish other people as she distinguished Madonna, but it was useless. “Snooks” was not to be imposed upon, and only uttered her peculiar cry—as she was uttering it now on the studio rug—under the caressing touch of one light and ever-welcome hand.

Having left the cat to her repose, Madonna, looking round the room, immediately observed the cast on the office stool; and at the same time, Mr. Blyth, who saw the direction taken by her eyes, handed to her a port-crayon with some black chalk, which he had been carefully cutting to a point for the last minute or two. She took it with a little mock curtsy, pouting her lip slightly, as if drawing the Venus was work not much to her taste—then smiled, when she saw Valentine solemnly shaking his head, and frowning comically at her—then went away at once to the drawing-board, and sat down opposite Venus, in which position she offered as decided a living

contradiction as ever was seen to the assertion of the classical idea of beauty, as expressed in the cast that she was now about to copy.

Mr. Blyth, on his side, set to work at last on the Landscape; painting upon the Bacchanalian Nymphs, who sadly wanted a little brightening up,—or, as he would have technically expressed it, a little “fetching out.” While the painter and the young lady are industriously occupied with the business of the studio, there is leisure to remark on one rather perplexing characteristic of their intercourse, so far as it has yet proceeded on this particular winter’s morning.

Ever since Madonna has been in the room, not one word has she spoken to Valentine; and not one word has Valentine (who can talk glibly enough to himself) spoken to her. He never said “Good morning,” when he kissed her—or, “Thank you for finding the Vandyck brown,”—or, “What do you think of Snooks’s new kitten?”—or, “I have set the Venus, my dear, for your drawing lesson to-day.” And she, woman as she is, has actually not asked him a single question! has not even said “poor pussy!” when

she was fondling the cat on the rug. What can this absolute and remarkable silence mean, between two people who look as affectionately and pleasantly on each other as these two look, every time their eyes meet !

Why have they not once spoken together, from the time when she opened the studio door?

Is this one of the mysteries of the Painter's fireside ?

Who is Madonna ?

What is her real name besides Mary ?

Is it Mary Blyth ?

Some years ago a curious adventure happened to Valentine in the circus of an itinerant Equestrian Company ; and a very strange story was related to him by the wife of an ordinary stage-tumbler or clown.

But who is Madonna ? And wherefore the absolute silence between her and Mr. Blyth ?

The answer to these questions is only to be found in the Adventure, in the Story, and in the Result which they brought about.

CHAPTER V.

THE ADVENTURE.

IN the autumn of 1838, Mrs. Blyth's malady had for some time past assumed the final and permanent form, from which it never afterwards varied. She now suffered little actual pain, except when she quitted a recumbent posture. But the general weakness and disorganisation produced by almost exclusive confinement to one position, had, even at this early period, begun to work sad changes in her personal appearance. She suffered that mortifying misfortune, however, just as bravely and resignedly as she had suffered the first great calamity of her incurable disorder. Valentine never showed that he thought her altered; Valentine's kindness was just as affectionate, as spontaneous, and as constant as it had ever been in the happier days of their marriage.

So encouraged, Lavinia had the heart to bear all burdens patiently ; and could find sources of happiness for herself, where others could discover nothing but causes for grief.

The room she inhabited was already, through Valentine's self-denying industry, better furnished than any other room in the house ; but was far from presenting the same appearance of refined luxury and tasteful completeness, to which it attained gradually in the course of after years.

The charming little maple-wood and ivory bookcase, with the prettily-bound volumes ranged in such bright regularity along its shelves, was there certainly, as early as the autumn of 1838. It would not, though, at that time, have formed part of the furniture of Mrs. Blyth's room, but for a chance piece of good fortune, which her husband was doubtful about accepting when it first came to him. He had, it is true, often been to look at the bookcase in the upholsterer's show-room, but was almost resigned to view it as a forbidden treasure, far beyond any means of acquisition then at his disposal, unless indeed he availed himself of a certain professional invitation

to the country which he had just received, and which, on his wife's account, he was very unwilling to accept.

Upon renewed consideration, however, the thought of his future pride and pleasure, if he could see the charming little bookcase in Lavinia's room, at last supplied him with a motive for departure, which overcame his reluctance to separate himself for any length of time from his invalid wife. Having once arrived at a resolution, he immediately wrote two notes, one to order the new bookcase, the other to secure the means of paying for it, by accepting the professional invitation to the country.

This invitation had been sent to him by a clerical friend, the Reverend Doctor Joyce, Rector of St. Judy's, in the large agricultural town of Rubbleford. Valentine had done a water-colour drawing of one of the Doctor's babies, when the family at the rectory were in London for a season, and this drawing had been shown to all the neighbours by the worthy clergyman on his return. Now, although Mr. Blyth was not over successful in the adult

department of portrait-art, he was invariably victorious in the baby-department. He painted all infants on one ingenious plan. He gave them the roundest eyes, the chubbiest red cheeks, the most serenely good-humoured smiles, and the neatest and whitest caps ever seen on paper. If fathers and their male friends rarely appreciated the fidelity of his likenesses, mothers and nurses invariably made amends for their want of taste. The fair sex rallied round Valentine's baby-portraits to a woman; always proclaiming at sight of them, with little screams of ecstasy, that for "sweetly-pretty" representations of infant innocence, the painter never yet lived who could be compared with Mr. Blyth.

It followed, therefore, almost as a matter of course, that the local exhibition of the Doctor's drawing must bring offers of long-clothes-portrait employment to Valentine. Three resident families decided immediately to have their babies done, if the painter would only travel to their houses to take the likenesses. A bachelor sporting squire in the neighbourhood also

volunteered a commission of another sort. This gentleman arrived (by a logical process which it is hopeless to think of tracing), at the conclusion, that a man who was great at babies, must necessarily be marvellous at horses; and determined, in consequence, that Valentine should paint his celebrated cover-hack.

In writing to inform his friend of these offers, Doctor Joyce added another professional order on his own account, desiring that Mr. Blyth should take the portrait of his favourite curate, who, though very weakly and consumptive, was about to leave him to join a mission to the Cape; and whom the rector greatly feared he might never set eyes on again in this world. Here, then, were five commissions, which would produce enough—cheaply as Valentine worked, to pay, not only for the new bookcase, but for some new books to put in it when it came home.

Having left his wife in charge of two of her sisters, who were forbidden to leave the house till his return, Mr. Blyth started for the rectory, and once there, set to work on the babies with

a zeal and good-humour which straightway won the hearts of mothers and nurses, and made him a great Rubbleford reputation in the course of a few days. Having done the babies to admiration, he next attacked the curate; producing a painfully striking likeness of that ill-fated gentleman; front face, pen in hand, looking up for inspiration over half-done sermon in neat black leather cover. And, no sooner was this latter piece of workmanship turned out complete, than away went Valentine, brisk and dauntless as ever, to undertake the last great effort of immortalising on canvas the bachelor squire's hack.

Here he had some trouble. The sporting gentleman would look over him while he painted; would bewilder him with the pedigree of the horse; would have the animal done in the most unpicturesque view; and sternly forbade all introduction of "tone," "light and shade," or purely artistic embellishment of any kind, in any part of the canvas. In short, the squire wanted a sign-board instead of a picture, and he at last got what he wanted to his heart's content.

One evening, while Valentine, still deeply immersed in the difficulties of depicting the cover-hack, was returning to the Rectory, after a day's work at the Squire's house, his attention was suddenly attracted in the high street of Rubbleford, by a flaming placard pasted up on a dead wall opposite the market-house.

He immediately joined the crowd of rustics congregated around the many-coloured and magnificent sheet of paper, and read at the top of it, in huge blue letters :—"JUBBER'S CIRCUS. THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD." After this came some small print, which nobody lost any time in noticing. But, below the small print appeared a perfect galaxy of fancifully shaped scarlet letters, which fascinated all eyes ; and informed the public that the equestrian company included "MISS FLORINDA BELVERLEY, known" (here the letters turned suddenly green), "wherever the English language was known, as The Amazonian Empress of the Realms of Equitation." This announcement was followed by the names of inferior members of the company ; by a programme of the evening's

entertainments; by testimonials extracted from the provincial press; by illustrations of gentlemen with lusty calves and spangled drawers, and of ladies with smiling faces, shameless petticoats, and pirouetting legs. These illustrations, and the particulars which preceded them were carefully digested by all Mr. Blyth's neighbours; but Mr. Blyth himself passed them over unnoticed. His eye had been caught by something at the bottom of the placard, which instantly absorbed his whole attention.

In this place the red letters appeared again, and formed the following words and marks of admiration :—

THE MYSTERIOUS FOUNDLING!

AGED TEN YEARS!!

TOTALLY DEAF AND DUMB!!!

Underneath came an explanation of what the red letters referred to, occupying no less than three paragraphs of stumpy small print, every word of which Valentine eagerly devoured. This is what he read :—

“Mr. Jubber, as proprietor of the renowned

Circus, has the honour of informing the nobility, gentry, and public, that the above wonderful Deaf and Dumb Female Child will appear between the first and second parts of the evening's performances. Mr. J. has taken the liberty of entitling this Marvel of Nature, The Mysterious Foundling; no one knowing who her father is, and her mother having died soon after her birth, leaving her in charge of the Equestrian Company, who have been fond parents and guardians to her ever since.

"She was originally celebrated in the former annals of Jubber's Circus, or Eighth Wonder of the World, as The Hurricane Child of the Desert; having appeared in that character, whirled aloft at the age of seven years in the hand of Muley Ben Hassan, the renowned Devil-Scourer of Sahara, in his daring act of equitation, as exhibited to the terror and amazement of all England, in Jubber's Circus. At that time she had her hearing and speech quite perfect. But Mr. J. deeply regrets to state that a terrific accident happened to her soon afterwards. Through no fault on the part of The Devil-

Scourer (who never made a mistake in his life ; and who, overcome by his feelings at the result of the above-mentioned frightful accident, has gone back to his native wilds a moody and broken-hearted man), she slipped from his hand while the three horses bestrode by the fiery but humane Arab were going at a gallop, and fell, shocking to relate, outside the Ring, on the boarded floor of the Circus. She was supposed to be dead. Mr. Jubber instantly secured the inestimable assistance of the Faculty, who found that she was still alive, and set her arm which had been broken. It was only afterwards discovered that she had utterly lost her sense of hearing ; or, to use the emphatic language of the medical gentlemen (who all spoke with tears in their eyes), that she had been struck stone deaf by the shock. Under these melancholy circumstances, it was found that the faculty of speech soon failed her altogether ; and she is now therefore Totally Deaf AND Dumb ; but Mr. J. rejoices to say, quite cheerful and in good health notwithstanding.

“ Mr. Jubber being himself the father of a

family, ventures to think that these little particulars may prove of some interest to an Intelligent, a Sympathetic, and a Benevolent Public. He will simply allude, in conclusion, to the performances of the Mysterious Foundling, as exhibiting perfection hitherto unparalleled in the Art of Legerdemain, with wonders of untraceable intricacy on the cards, which were originally the result of abstruse calculations made by the renowned Algebraist, Mohammed Engedi, extending over a period of ten years, dating from the year 1215 of the Arab Chronology. More than this, Mr. Jubber will not venture to relate: for 'Seeing Is Believing,' and the Mysterious Foundling must be seen to be believed. For prices of admission consult bottom of bill."

Mr. Blyth read this grotesquely shocking narrative with sentiments which were anything rather than complimentary to the taste, the delicacy, and the humanity of the fluent Mr. Jubber. He consulted the bottom of the bill, however, as requested; and ascertained what were the prices of admission—then glanced at

the top, and observed that the first performance was fixed for that very evening—looked about him absently for a minute or two—and resolved to be present at it.

Most assuredly Valentine's resolution did not proceed from that dastard insensibility to all decent respect for human suffering which could feast itself on the spectacle of calamity paraded for hire, in the person of a deaf and dumb child of ten years old. His motives for going to the circus were stained by no trace of such degradation as this. But what were they then? That question he himself could not have answered: it was a common predicament with him not to know his own motives, generally from not inquiring into them. There are men who run breathlessly—men who walk cautiously—and men who saunter easily through the journey of life. Valentine belonged to the latter class; and, like the rest of his order, often strayed down a new turning, without being able to realize at the time what purpose it was which first took him that way. Our destinies shape the future for us out of strange materials: a travelling

circus sufficed them, in the first instance, to shape a new future for Mr. Blyth.

He first went on to the Rectory to tell them where he was going, and to get a cup of tea, and then hurried off to the circus—a wooden building in a field outside the town.

The performance had begun some time when he got in. The Amazonian Empress (known in mere ordinary male and female society as Miss Florinda Belverley) was dancing voluptuously on the back of a cantering piebald horse with a Roman nose. Round and round, in her own undisputed "realm of equitation," careered the Empress, beating time on the saddle with her imperial legs to the tune of "Let the Toast be Dear Woman," played with true amatory feeling by the band. Suddenly the melody changed to "See the Conquering Hero comes;" the piebald horse increased his speed; the Empress raised a flag in one hand, and a javelin in the other, and began slaying invisible enemies in the empty air, at full (circus) gallop. The triumph was prodigious; the applause tremendous: Mr. Blyth alone sat unmoved. Miss Florinda Belverley

was not even a good model to draw legs from, in the estimation of this anti-Amazonian painter!

And when the Empress was succeeded by a Spanish Guerilla, who robbed, murdered, danced, caroused, and made love on the back of a cream-coloured horse—and when the Guerilla was followed by a clown who performed frightful contortions, and made irresistibly comic faces—still Mr. Blyth exhibited not the slightest demonstration of astonishment or pleasure. It was only when a bell rang between the first and second parts of the performance, and the band struck up “Gentle Zitella,” that he showed any symptoms of animation. Then he suddenly rose; and, moving down from the seat he had hitherto occupied to a bench close against the low partition which separated the ring from the audience, fixed his eyes intently on a doorway opposite to him, overhung by a frowsy red curtain with a tinsel border.

From this doorway there now appeared Mr. Jubber himself, clothed in white trowsers with a gold stripe, and a green jacket with military epaulettes. He had big, bold eyes, dyed

moustaches, great fat, flabby cheeks, long hair parted in the middle, a turn-down collar with a rose-coloured handkerchief; and was, in every respect, the most atrocious looking stage black-guard that ever painted an insolent and ugly face. He led with him, holding her hand—oh, soiling and shameful contact!—the little deaf and dumb girl, whose misfortune he had advertised to the whole population of Rubbleford.

The face and manner of the child, as she walked into the centre of the circus, and made her innocent curtsy and kissed her hand, went to the hearts of the whole audience in an instant. They greeted her with such a burst of applause as might have frightened a grown actress. But not a note from those cheering voices, not a breath of sound from those loudly clapping hands could reach her; she could *see* that they were welcoming her kindly, and that was all!

When the applause had subsided, Mr. Jubber asked for the loan of a handkerchief from one of the ladies present, and ostentatiously bandaged her eyes. He then lifted her upon the broad low wall which encircled the ring, and walked

her round a little way (beginning from the door through which he had entered), inviting the spectators to test her total deafness by clapping their hands, shouting, or making any loud noise they pleased close at her ear. "You might fire off a cannon, ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Jubber jocularly, "and it wouldn't make her start till after she'd smelt the smoke!"

To the credit of the Rubbleford audience, the majority of them declined making any practical experiments to test the poor child's utter deafness. The women set the example of forbearance, by entreating that the handkerchief might be taken off, so that they might see her pretty eyes again. This was done at once, and then she began to perform her conjuring tricks with Mr. Jubber and one of the ring-keepers on either side of her, officiating as assistants. These tricks, in themselves, were of the simplest and commonest kind; and derived all their attraction from the child's innocently earnest manner of exhibiting them, and from the novelty to the audience of communicating with her only by writing on a slate. They never tired of scrawling questions, of saying "poor

little thing!" and of kissing her whenever they could get the opportunity, while she slowly went round the circus. "Deaf and dumb! ah, dear, dear, deaf and dumb!" was the general murmur of sympathy which greeted her from each new group, as she advanced; Mr. Jubber invariably adding with a smile: "And as you see, ladies and gentlemen, in excellent health and spirits, notwithstanding: as hearty and happy, I pledge you my sacred word of honour, as the very best of us!"

Now, while she was thus delighting the spectators on one side of the circus, how were the spectators on the other side, whose places she had not yet reached, contriving to amuse themselves?

From the moment of the little girl's first appearance, ample recreation had been unconsciously provided for them by a tall, stout, and florid stranger, who appeared suddenly to lose his senses the moment he set eyes on the deaf and dumb child. This gentleman jumped up and sat down again excitably a dozen times in a minute; constantly apologizing on being called to order, and constantly repeating the offence the moment afterwards. Mad and mysterious words, never

heard before in Rubbleford, poured from his lips. "Devotional beauty," "Early Italian art," "Fra Angelico's angels," "Giotto and the cherubs," "Enough to bring the divine Raphael down from heaven to paint her." Such were a few fragments of the mad gentleman's incoherent mutterings, as they reached his neighbours' ears. The amusement they yielded was soon wrought to its climax by a joke from an attorney's clerk, who suggested that this queer man, with the rosy face, must certainly be the long-lost father of the "Mysterious Foundling!" Great gratification was consequently anticipated from what might take place when the child arrived opposite the bench occupied by the excitable stranger.

Slowly, slowly, the little light figure went round upon the broad partition wall of the ring, until it came near, very near, to the place where Valentine was sitting.

Ah, woful sight! so lovely, yet so piteous to look on! Shall she never, never hear kindly human voices, the song of birds, the pleasant murmur of the trees again? Are all the sweet sounds that sing of happiness to childhood, silent

for ever to *her* From those fresh, rosy lips shall no glad words pour forth, when she runs and plays in the sunshine? Shall the clear, laughing tones be hushed always? the young, tender life be for ever a speechless thing, shut up in dumbness from the free world of voices? Oh! Angel of judgment! hast thou snatched her hearing and her speech from this little child, to abandon her in helpless affliction to such profanation as she now undergoes? Oh, Spirit of mercy! how long thy white-winged feet have tarried on their way to this innocent sufferer, to this lost lamb that cannot cry to the fold for help! Lead, ah, lead her tenderly to such shelter as she has never yet found for herself! Guide her, pure as she is now, from this tainted place to pleasant pastures, where the sunshine of human kindness shall be clouded no more, and Love and Pity shall temper every wind that blows over her with the gentleness of perpetual spring!

Slowly, slowly, the light figure went round the great circle of gazers, ministering obediently to their pleasure, waiting patiently till their curiosity was satisfied. And now, her weary pilgrimage

was well nigh over for the night. She had arrived at the last group of spectators who had yet to see what she looked like close, and what tricks she could exhibit with her cards.

She stopped exactly opposite to Valentine; and when she looked up, she looked on him alone.

Was there something in the eager sympathy of his eyes as they met hers, which spoke to the little lonely heart in the sole language that could ever reach it? Did the child, with the quick instinct of the deaf and dumb, read his compassionate disposition, his quick impetuous sensibilities, his pity and longing to help her, in his expression at that moment? It might have been so. Her pretty, rosy lips, smiled on him as they had smiled on no one else that night; and when she held out some cards to be chosen from, she left unnoticed the eager hands extended on either side of her, and presented them to Valentine only.

He saw the small fingers trembling as they held the cards; he saw the delicate little shoulders and the poor frail neck and chest bedizened with tawdry mock jewelry and spangles; he saw the

innocent young face, whose pure beauty no soil of stage paint could disfigure, with the smile still on the parted lips, but with a patient forlornness in the sad blue eyes, as if the seeing-sense that was left, mourned always for the hearing and speaking senses that were gone—he marked all these things in an instant, and felt that his heart was sinking as he looked. A dimness stole over his sight; a suffocating sensation oppressed his breathing; the lights in the circus danced and mingled together; he bent down over the child's hand, and took it in his own, twice kissed it fervently, then, to the utter amazement of the laughing crowd about him, rose up suddenly, and, muttering something about a pitiable sight that was too heart-rending to look at, forced his way out as violently as if he had been flying for his life.

There was a momentary confusion among the audience. Mr. Jubber was too old an adept in stage-business of all kinds not to know how to stop the growing tumult directly, and turn it into universal applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, with a

finely modulated tremor in his voice — “I implore you to be seated, and to excuse the conduct of the party who has just absented himself. The talent of The Mysterious Foundling has overcome people in that way in every town of England (cheers). Do I err in believing that a Rubbleford audience can make kind allowances for their weaker fellow-creatures? (Bravo and cheers.) Thanks, a thousand thanks in the name of this darling and talented child, for your cordial, your generous, your affectionate, your inestimable reception of her exertions to-night!” And with this peroration Mr. Jubber left the ring with his pupil, amid the most vehement cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs. He was too much excited by his triumph to notice that the child, as she walked after him, looked wistfully, to the last, in the direction by which Valentine had gone out.

“The public like excitement,” soliloquised Mr. Jubber, as he disappeared behind the red curtain. “I must have all this in the bills to-morrow. It’s safe to draw at least thirty shillings worth extra into the house at night.”

In the meantime, Valentine, after some blundering at wrong doors, at last found his way out of the circus, and stood alone on the cool grass, in the cloudless autumn moonlight. He struck his stick violently on the ground, which at that moment represented to him the head of Mr. Jubber; and, still muttering to himself, was about to return straight to the rectory, when he heard a breathless voice behind him, calling:—"Stop, sir! oh, do please stop for one minute!"

He turned round. A fat, comely woman in a tawdry and tattered gown was running towards him as fast as her natural impediments to quick progression would permit.

"Please, sir," she cried—"Please, sir, wasn't you the gentleman that was taken queer at seeing our little Foundling? I was peeping through the red curtain, sir, just at the time."

Instead of answering the question, Valentine instantly began to rhapsodise about the child's face.

"Oh, sir! if you know anything about her," interposed the woman, "for God's sake don't

scruple to tell it to me! I'm only Mrs. Peckover, sir, the wife of Jemmy Peckover, the clown, as they call him, that you saw in the circus to-night. But I took and nursed the little thing by her poor mother's own wish; and ever since that time—"

"My dear, good soul," said Mr. Blyth, "I know nothing of the poor little creature. I only wish from the bottom of my heart that I could do something to help her and make her happy. If Lavvie and I had had such an angel of a child as that," continued Valentine, clasping his hands together fervently, "deaf and dumb as she is, we should have thanked God for her every day of our lives!"

Mrs. Peckover was apparently not much used to hear such sentiments as these from strangers. She stared up at Mr. Blyth with two big tears rolling over her plump cheeks.

"Mrs. Peckover! Hullo there, Peck! where are you?" roared a stern voice from the stable department of the circus, just as the clown's wife seemed about to speak again.

Mrs. Peckover started, curtsied, and, without

uttering another word, went back even faster than she had come out. Valentine looked after her intently, but made no attempt to follow: he was thinking too much of the child to think of that. When he moved again, it was to return to the rectory.

He penetrated at once into the library, where Doctor Joyce was spelling over the "Rubbleford Mercury," while Mrs. Joyce sat opposite to him, knitting a fancy jacket for her youngest but one. He was hardly inside the door before he began to expatiate in the wildest manner on the subject of the beautiful deaf and dumb girl. Pages would not suffice to repeat one half of the extravagances he now uttered. If ever man was in love with a child at first sight, he was that man. As an artist, as a gentleman of refined tastes, and as the softest-hearted of male human beings, in all three capacities, he was enslaved by that little innocent sad face. He made the Doctor's head whirl again; he fairly stopped Mrs. Joyce's progress with the fancy jacket, as he sang the child's praises, and compared her face to every angel's face that had ever been

painted, from the days of Giotto to the present time. At last, when he had fairly exhausted his hearers and himself, he dashed abruptly out of the room to cool down his excitement by a moonlight walk in the rectory garden.

"What a very odd man he is!" said Mrs. Joyce, taking up a dropped stitch in the fancy jacket.

"Valentine, my love, is the best creature in the world," rejoined the doctor, folding up the "Rubbleford Mercury," and directing it for the post; "but, as I often used to tell his poor father (who never would believe me), a little cracked. I've known him go on in this way about children before—though I must own, not quite so wildly perhaps as he talked just now."

"Do you think he'll do anything imprudent about the child? Poor thing! I'm sure I pity her as heartily as anybody can."

"I don't presume to think," answered the doctor, calmly pressing the blotting-paper over the address he had just written. "Valentine is one of those people who defy all conjecture. No one can say what he will do, or what he won't.

A man who cannot resist an application for shelter and supper from any stray cur who wags his tail at him in the street; a man who blindly believes in the troubles of begging-letter impostors; a man whom I myself caught, last time he was down here, playing at marbles with three of my charity-boys in the street, and promising to treat them to hardbake and ginger-beer afterwards, is—in short, is not a man whose actions it is possible to speculate on.”

Here the door opened, and Mr. Blyth’s head was popped in, surmounted by a ragged straw hat with a sky-blue ribbon round it. “Doctor,” said Valentine, “may I ask an excellent woman, with whom I have made acquaintance, to bring the child here to-morrow morning for you and Mrs. Joyce to see?”

“Certainly,” said the good-humoured rector, laughing. “The child by all means, and the excellent woman too.”

“Not if it’s Miss Florinda Belverley!” severely interposed Mrs. Joyce (who had read the Circus placard). “Florinda, indeed! Jezebel would be a better name for her!”

"My dear madam, it isn't Florinda," cried Valentine, eagerly. "I quite agree with you; her name ought to be Jezebel. And, what's worse, her legs are out of drawing."

"Mr. Blyth!!!" exclaimed Mrs. Joyce, indignant at this professional criticism on Jezebel's legs.

"Why don't you tell us at once who the excellent woman is?" cried the doctor, exquisitely tickled at the allusion which had shocked his wife.

"Her name's Peckover," said Valentine, "she's a respectable married woman; she doesn't ride in the circus at all; and she nursed the poor child by her mother's own wish."

"We shall be delighted to see her to-morrow," said the warm-hearted rector— "or, no—stop! Not to-morrow; I shall be out. The day after. Cake and cowslip wine for the deaf and dumb child at twelve o'clock—eh, my dear?"

"That's right! God bless you! you're always kindness itself," cried Valentine; "I'll find out Mrs. Peckover, and let her know. Not a wink of sleep for me to-night—never mind!" Here

Valentine suddenly shut the door, then as suddenly opened it again, and added: "I mean to finish that nasty horse-picture to-morrow, and go to the circus again in the evening." With these words he vanished; and they heard him soon afterwards whistling his favourite "Drops of Brandy," in the rectory garden.

"Cracked! cracked!" cried the doctor. "Dear old Valentine!"

"I'm afraid his principles are very loose," said Mrs. Joyce, whose thoughts still ran on the unlucky professional allusion to Jezebel's legs.

The next morning, when Mr. Blyth presented himself at the stables, and went on with the portrait of the cover-hack, the Squire had no longer the slightest reason to complain of the painter's desire to combine in his work picturesqueness of effect with accuracy of resemblance. Valentine argued no longer about introducing "light and shade," or "throwing cast-shadows," or "keeping the background subdued in tone." His thoughts were all with the deaf and dumb child and Mrs. Peckover; and he smudged away recklessly, just as he was

told, without once uttering so much as a word of protest. By the evening he had concluded his labour. The squire said it was one of the best portraits of a horse that had ever been taken : to which piece of criticism the writer of the present narrative is bound in common candour to add, that it was also the very worst picture that Mr. Blyth had ever painted.

On returning to Rubbleford, Valentine proceeded at once to the circus ; placing himself, as nearly as he could, in the same position which he had occupied the night before.

The child was again applauded by the whole audience, and again went through her performance intelligently and gracefully, until she approached the place where Valentine was standing. She started as she recognised his face, and made a step forward to get nearer to him ; but was stopped by Mr. Jubber, who saw that the people immediately in front of her were holding out their hands to write on her slate, and have her cards dealt round to them in their turn. The child's attention seemed to be distracted by seeing the stranger again who had kissed her

hand so fervently—she began to look confused, and ready to cry—and ended by committing an open and most palpable blunder in the very first trick that she performed.

The spectators good-naturedly laughed, and some of them wrote on her slate, "Try again, little girl." Mr. Jubber made an apology, saying that the extreme enthusiasm of the reception accorded to his pupil had shaken her nerves; and then signed to her, with a benevolent smile, but with a very sinister expression in his eyes, to try another trick. She succeeded in this; but still showed so much hesitation, that Mr. Jubber, fearing another failure, took her away with him while there was a chance of making a creditable exit. As she was led across the ring, the child looked intently at Valentine.

There was terror in her eyes—terror palpable enough to be remarked by some of the careless people near Mr. Blyth. "Poor little thing! she seems frightened at the man in the fine green jacket," said one. "And not without cause, I dare say," added another. "You don't mean that he could ever be brute enough to ill use

a child like that?—it's impossible!" cried a third.

At this moment the clown entered the ring. The instant before he shouted the well-known "Here we are!" Valentine thought he heard a low strange cry behind the red curtain. He was not certain about it, but the mere doubt made his blood run chill. He listened for a minute anxiously. There was no chance now, however, of testing the correctness of his suspicion. The band had struck up a noisy jig-tune, and the clown was capering and tumbling wonderfully, amid roars of laughter.

"This may be my fault," thought Valentine. "*This!* What?" He was afraid to pursue that inquiry. His ruddy face suddenly turned pale; and he left the circus, determined to find out what was really going on behind the red curtain.

He walked round the outside of the building, wasting some time before he found a door to apply at for admission. At last he came to a sort of passage, with some tattered horse-cloths hanging over its outer entrance.

"You can't come in here," said a shabby lad,

suddenly appearing from the inside in his shirt sleeves.

Mr. Blyth took out half-a-crown. "I want to see the deaf and dumb child directly!"

"Oh, all right! go in," muttered the lad, pocketing the money greedily. "Jubber ain't there 'now? Only don't let him ketch yer there—that's all! She's nohow fit to be seen, mind ye; she have just been a-crying."

Valentine listened to no more, and hastily entered the passage. As soon as he was inside, a sound reached his ears at which his heart sickened and turned faint. No words can describe it in all the horror of its helplessness—for it was the moan of pain from a dumb human creature.

He thrust aside a curtain, and stood in a filthy place, partitioned off from the stables on one side, and the circus on the other, with canvas and old boards. There, on a wooden stool, sat the woman who had accosted him the night before, crying, and soothing the child who lay shuddering on her bosom. The sobs of the clown's wife mingled with the inarticulate wailing, so low yet so awful

to hear; and both sounds were audible with a fearful, unnatural distinctness, through the merry melody of the jig, and the peals of hearty laughter from the delighted audience in the circus.

"Oh, my God!" cried Valentine, horror-struck at what he heard, "Stop her! don't let her moan in that way!"

The woman started from her seat, and put the child down, then recognised Mr. Blyth and rushed up to him.

"Hush!" she whispered eagerly; "don't call out like that! The villain, the brutal heartless villain is somewhere about the stables. If he hears you he'll come in and beat her again.—Oh, hush! hush, for God's sake! It's true—he beat her—the cowardly, hellish brute!—only for making that one little mistake with the cards. No! no! no! don't speak out loud or you'll ruin us. How did you ever get in here?—Oh! you *must* be quiet! There, sit down.—Hark! I'm sure he's coming! Oh! go away—go away!"

She tried to pull Valentine out of the chair into which she had thrust him but the instant before. He seized tight hold of her hand and

refused to move. If Mr. Jubber had come in at that moment, he would have been thrashed within an inch of his life.

The child had ceased moaning when she saw Valentine. She anxiously looked at him through her tears—then turned away quickly—took out her little handkerchief—and began to dry her eyes.

“I can’t go yet—I’ll promise only to whisper—you *must* listen to me,” said Mr. Blyth, pale and panting for breath; “I mean to prevent this from ever happening again—don’t speak!—I’ll take that injured, beautiful, patient little angel away from this villainous place: I will, if I go before a magistrate! The rector’s a magistrate—he’s my friend—his name’s Doctor Joyce—I’ll take her away—”

The woman stopped him by pointing suddenly to the child.

She had put back the handkerchief, and was approaching him. She came close and laid one hand on his knee, and timidly raised the other as high as she could towards his neck. Standing so, she looked up quietly into his face. The pretty

lips tried hard to smile once more; but they only trembled for an instant, and then closed again. The clear soft eyes, still dim with tears, sought his with an innocent gaze of inquiry and wonder. At that moment, the expression of the sad and lovely little face seemed to say—"You look as if you wanted to be kind to me; I wish you could find out some way of telling me of it."

Valentine's heart told him what was the only way. He caught her up in his arms, and half smothered her with kisses. The frail childish hands rose trembling, and clasped themselves gently round his neck; and the fair head drooped lower and lower wearily, until it lay on his shoulder.

The clown's wife turned away her face, desperately stifling with both hands the sobs that were beginning to burst from her afresh. Then whispered, "Oh, go sir,—pray go! Some of the riders will be in here directly; you'll get us into dreadful trouble!"

Valentine rose, still holding the child in his arms. "I'll go if you promise me——"

"Oh! I'll promise anything, sir!"

"You know the rectory! Doctor Joyce's—the clergyman—my kind friend—"

"Yes, sir; I know it. You said that before. Do, please, for little Mary's sake, be as quick as you can!"

"Mary! Her name's Mary?" Valentine drew back into a corner, and began kissing the child again.

"You must be out of your senses to keep on in that way after what I've told you!" cried the clown's wife, wringing her hands in despair, and trying to drag him out of the corner. "Jubber and all of 'em will be in here in another minute. She'll be beaten again, if you're caught with her; oh Lord! oh Lord! will nothing make you understand that?"

He understood it only too well, and put the child down instantly, his face turning pale again, his agitation becoming so violent, that he never noticed the hand which she held out towards him, or the appealing look that accompanied the action, and said so plainly and pathetically: "I want to bid you good-bye; but I can't say it as other

children can." He never observed this; for he had taken Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and had drawn her away hurriedly after him into the passage.

The child made no attempt to follow them: she turned aside, and, sitting down in the darkest corner of the miserable place, rested her head against the rough partition, which was all that divided her from the laughing audience. Her lips began to tremble again: she took out the handkerchief once more, and hid her face in it.

"Now, recollect your promise," whispered Valentine to the clown's wife, who was slowly pushing him out, all the time he was speaking to her. "You must bring little Mary to the Rectory to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock exactly—you must! or I'll come here and fetch her myself. You needn't believe *me*; I'm only an artist and a stranger: I don't expect you to believe *me*. But you must believe a clergyman—you can't help that! Doctor and Mrs. Joyce want to see your little Mary. It's their invitation mind! You can't refuse the rector. He's the best and kindest man that ever—"

"I'll bring her, sir, if you'll only go now. I'll bring her—I will, as sure as I stand here!"

"If you don't!" cried Valentine, still distrustful, and trembling all over with agitation. "If you dont!"—

He stopped; for he suddenly felt the open air blowing on his face. The clown's wife was gone, and nothing remained for him to threaten, but the tattered horse-cloths that hung over the empty doorway.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY.—PART FIRST.

It is a quarter to twelve by the hall clock at the Rectory, and one of the finest autumn mornings of the whole season. Vance, Doctor Joyce's middle-aged man servant, or "Bishop" Vance, as the small wits of Rubbleford call him, in allusion to his sleek and solemn appearance, his respectable manner, his clerical cravat, and his speckless black garments, is placing the cake and cowslip wine on the dining-table, with as much stately formality and pompous precision as if his master expected an archbishop to lunch, instead of a clown's wife and a little girl of ten years old. It is quite a sight to see Vance retiring, and looking at the general effect of each knife and fork as he lays it down; or solemnly strutting about the room, with a spotless napkin waving gently

in his hand; or patronisingly confronting the pretty housemaid at the door, and taking plates and dishes from her with the air of a kitchen Sultan who can never afford to lose his dignity for a moment in the presence of the female slaves.

The dining-room window opens into the Rectory garden. The morning shadows cast by the noble old elm-trees that grow all around, are fading from the bright lawn. The rich flower-beds gleam like beds of jewels in the radiant sunshine. The rookery is almost deserted, a solitary sleepy *caw* being only heard now and then at long intervals. The singing of birds, and the buzzing of busy insects sound faint, distant, and musical. On a shady seat, among the trees, Mrs. Joyce is just visible, working in the open air. One of her daughters sits reading on the turf at her feet. The other is giving the younger children a ride by turns on the back of a large Newfoundland dog, who walks along slowly with his tongue hanging out, and his great bushy tail wagging gently. A prettier scene of garden beauty and family repose could not be found in all England,

than the scene which the view through the Rectory window now presents.

The household tranquillity, however, is not entirely uninterrupted. Across the picture, of which Vance and the luncheon-table form the foreground, and the garden with Mrs. Joyce and the young ladies, the middle-distance and background, there flits from time to time an unquiet figure, which never leaves off fidgeting about here, there, and everywhere. This figure is always greeted by Leo, the Newfoundland dog, with an extra wag of the tail; and is apostrophised laughingly by the young ladies, under the appellation of "funny Mr. Blyth."

Valentine has in fact let nobody have any rest, either in the house or the garden, since the first thing in the morning. The rector, having some letters to write, has bolted himself into his study in despair, and defies his excitable friend from that stronghold, until the arrival of Mrs. Peckover and the deaf and dumb child has quieted the painter's fidgety impatience for the striking of twelve o'clock, and the presence of the visitors from the circus. As for the miserable Vance,

Mr. Blyth has discomposed, worried, and put him out, till he looks suffocated with suppressed indignation. Mr. Blyth has invaded his sanctuary to ask whether the hall clock is right, and has caught him "cleaning himself" in his shirt sleeves. Mr. Blyth has broken one of his tumblers, and has mutinously insisted on showing him how to draw the cork of the cowslip-wine bottle. Mr. Blyth has knocked down a fork and two spoons, just as they were laid straight, by whisking past the table like a madman on his way into the garden. Mr. Blyth has bumped up against the housemaid in returning—again like a madman—to the dining-room, and has apologised to Susan by a joke which makes her giggle ecstatically in Vance's own face. If this sort of thing is to go on for a day or two longer, though he has been twenty years at the Rectory, Vance will be most assuredly goaded into giving the doctor warning.

It is five minutes to twelve. Valentine has skipped into the garden for the thirtieth time at least, to beg that Mrs. Joyce and the young ladies will repair to the dining-room, and be

ready to set Mrs. Peckover and her little charge quite at their ease the moment they come in. Mrs. Joyce consents to this proposal at last, and takes his offered arm; touching it, however, very gingerly, and looking straight before her, while he talks, with an air of matronly dignity and virtuous reserve. She is still convinced that Mr. Blyth's principles are extremely loose, and treats him exactly as she would have treated Don Juan himself under similar circumstances.

They all go into the dining-room. Mrs. Joyce and her daughters take their places, looking deliciously cool and neat in their bright morning dresses. Leo drops down lazily on the rug inside the window, with a thump of his great heavy body that makes the glasses ring. The doctor comes in with his letters for the post, and apostrophises Valentine with a harmless clerical joke. Vance solemnly touches up the already perfect arrangement of the luncheon table. The clock strikes twelve. A faint meek ring is heard at the Rectory bell.

Vance struts slowly to the door, when—Heaven and earth! are no household conventions held

sacred by these painters of pictures?—Mr. Blyth dashes past him with a shout of “Here they are!” and flies into the hall to answer the gate himself. Vance turns solemnly round towards his master, trembling and purple in the face, with an appealing expression, which says plainly enough:—“If *you* mean to stand this sort of outrage, sir, I beg most respectfully to inform you that *I* don’t.” The rector bursts out laughing; the young ladies follow his example; the Newfoundland dog jumps up, and joins in with his mighty bark. Mrs. Joyce sits silent, and looks at Vance, and sympathises with him.

The voice of Mr. Blyth is soon heard again in the hall, talking at a prodigious rate, without one audible word of answer proceeding from any other voice. The door of the dining-room, which has swung to, is suddenly pushed open, jostling the outraged Vance, who stands near it, into such a miserably undignified position flat against the wall, that the young ladies begin to titter behind their handkerchiefs as they look at him. Valentine enters, leading in Mrs. Peckover, and the deaf and dumb child, with such an air of supreme

triumph and happiness, that he looks absolutely handsome for the moment. The rector, who is in the best and noblest sense of the word, a gentleman, receives Mrs. Peckover as politely and cordially as he would have received the best lady in Rubbleford. Mrs. Joyce comes forward with him, very kind too, but a little reserved in her manner, nevertheless ; being possibly apprehensive that any woman connected with the circus, must necessarily be tainted with some slight flavour of Miss Florinda Belverley. The young ladies drop down into the most charming positions on either side of the child, and fall straightway into fits of ecstasy over her beauty. The dog walks up, and pokes his great honest muzzle among them companionably. Vance stands rigid against the wall, and disapproves strongly of the whole proceeding.

Poor Mrs. Peckover ! She had never been in such a house as the Rectory, she had never spoken to a doctor of divinity before in her life. She was very hot and red and trembling, and made fearful mistakes in grammar, and clung as shyly to Mr. Blyth as if she had been a little girl. The

rector soon contrived, however, to settle her comfortably in a seat by the table. She curtseyed reverentially to Vance, as she passed by him; doubtless under the impression that he was a second doctor of divinity, even greater and more learned than the first. He stared in return straight over her head, with small unwinking eyes, his cheeks turning slowly from deep red to dense purple. Mrs. Peckover shuddered inwardly, under the conviction that she had insulted a dignitary, who was hoisted up on some clerical elevation, too tremendous to be curtseyed to by such a social atom as a clown's wife.

Mrs. Joyce had to call three times to her daughters before she could get them to the luncheon-table. If she had possessed Valentine's eye for the picturesque and beautiful, she would certainly have been incapable of disturbing the group which her third summons broke up.

In the centre stood the deaf and dumb child, dressed in a white frock, with a little silk mantilla over it, made from a cast-off garment belonging to one of the ladies of the circus. She wore a plain straw hat, ornamented with a morsel of

narrow white ribbon, and tied under the chin with the same material. Her clear, delicate complexion was overspread by a slight rosy tinge—the tender colouring of nature, instead of the coarsely-glaring rouge with which they always disfigured her when she appeared before the public. Her wondering blue eyes, that looked so sad in the piercing gas-light, appeared to have lost that sadness in the mellow atmosphere of the Rector's dining-room. The tender and touching stillness which her affliction had cast over her face, seemed a little at variance with its childish immaturity of feature and roundness of form, but harmonised exquisitely with the quiet smile which seemed habitual to her when she was happy—gratefully and unrestrainedly happy, as she now felt among the new friends who were receiving her, not like a stranger and an inferior, but like a younger sister who had been long absent from them.

She stood near the window, the centre figure of the group, offering a little slate that hung by her side, with a pencil attached to it, to the rector's eldest daughter, who was sitting at her

right hand on a stool. The second of the young ladies knelt on the other side, with both her arms round the dog's neck ; holding him back as he stood in front of the child, so as to prevent him from licking her face, which he had made several resolute attempts to do, from the moment when she first entered the room. Both the Doctor's daughters were healthy rosy English beauties in the first bloom of girlhood ; and both were attired in the simplest and prettiest muslin dresses, very delicate in colour and pattern. Pity and admiration, mixed with some little perplexity and confusion, gave an unusual animation to their expressions ; for they could hardly accustom themselves as yet to the idea of the poor child's calamity. They talked to her eagerly, as if she could hear and answer them—while she, on her part, stood looking alternately from one to the other, watching their lips and eyes intently, and still holding out the slate, with her innocent gesture of invitation and gentle look of apology, for the eldest girl to write on. The varying expressions of the three ; the difference in their positions ; the charming contrast between their

light graceful figures, and the bulky strength and grand solidity of form in the noble Newfoundland dog who stood among them; the lustrous background of lawn and flowers and trees, seen through the open window; the sparkling purity of the sunshine which fell brightly over one part of the group; the transparency of the warm shadows that lay so caressingly, sometimes on a round smooth cheek, sometimes over ringlets of glistening hair, sometimes on the crisp folds of a muslin dress—all these accidental combinations of the moment, these natural and elegant positions of nature's setting, these accessories of light and shade, and back-ground garden objects beautifully and tenderly filling up the scene, presented together a picture which it was a luxury to be able to look on, which it seemed little short of absolute profanation to disturb.

Mrs. Joyce, nevertheless, pitilessly disarranged it. In a moment the living picture was destroyed; the young ladies were called to their mother's side; the child was placed between Valentine and Mrs. Peckover; and the important business of luncheon began in earnest.

It was wonderful to hear how Mr. Blyth talked; how he alternately glorified the clown's wife for the punctual performance of her promise, and appealed triumphantly to the rector to say, whether he had not underrated rather than exaggerated little Mary's beauty. It was also wonderful to see Mrs. Peckover's blank look of astonishment when she found the rigid doctor of divinity, who would not so much as notice her curtsy, suddenly relax into blandly supplying her with everything she wanted to eat or drink. But a very much more remarkable study of human nature than either of these, was afforded by the grimly patronising and profoundly puzzled aspect of Vance, as he waited, under protest, upon a woman from a travelling circus. It is something to see the Pope serving the pilgrims their dinner, during the Holy Week at Rome. Even that astounding sight, however, fades into nothing, as compared with the sublimer spectacle of Mr. Vance waiting upon Mrs. Peckover.

The rector, who was a sharp observer in his own quiet unobtrusive way, was struck by two

peculiarities in little Mary's behaviour during lunch. In the first place, he remarked with some interest and astonishment that, while the Clown's wife was, not unnaturally, very shy and embarrassed in her present position, among strangers who were greatly her social superiors, little Mary had maintained her self-possession, and had unconsciously adapted herself to her new sphere, from the moment when she first entered the dining-room. In the second place, he observed that she constantly nestled close to Valentine; looked at him oftener than she looked at any one else; and seemed to be always trying, sometimes not unsuccessfully, to guess what he was saying to others by watching his expression, his manner, and the action of his lips. "That child's character is no common one," thought Doctor Joyce; "she is older at heart than she looks; and is almost as fond of Blyth already as he is of her. Good old Valentine! it's pleasant to see that all his raptures have not been thrown away on a little fool with a pretty face."

When lunch was over, the eldest Miss Joyce whispered a petition in her mother's ear, "May

Carry and I take the dear little girl out with us to see our gardens, mamma?"

"Certainly, my love, if she likes to go. You had better ask her—Ah, dear! dear! I forgot—I mean, write on her slate. It's so hard to remember she's deaf and dumb, when one sees her sitting there looking so pretty and happy. She seems to like the cake. Remind me, Emmy, to tie some up for her in paper before she goes away."

Miss Emily and Miss Caroline went round to the child directly, and made signs for the slate. They alternately wrote on it with immense enthusiasm, until they had filled one side; signing their initials in the most business-like manner at the end of each line, thus:—

"Oh, do come and see my gardens. E. J."—
"We will gather you such a nice nosegay. C. J."—
"I have got some lovely little guinea-pigs. E. J."—"And Mark, our gardener, has made me a summer-house, with such funny chairs in it. C. J."—"You shall have my parasol to keep the sun off. E. J."—"And we will send Leo into the water as often as you like him to go. C. J."—

Thus they went on till they got to the bottom of the slate.

The child, after nodding her head and smiling as she read each fresh invitation, turned the slate over, and, with some little triumph at showing that she could write too, began slowly to trace some large text letters in extremely crooked lines. It took her a long time—especially as Mr. Blyth was breathlessly looking over her shoulder all the while—to get through these words: "Thank you for being so kind to me. I will go with you anywhere you like."

In a few minutes more the two young ladies and little Mary were walking over the bright lawn, with Leo in close attendance, carrying a stick in his mouth.

Valentine started up to follow them; then appeared suddenly to remember something, and sat down again with a very anxious expression on his face. He and Doctor Joyce looked at one another significantly. Before breakfast, that morning, they had been closeted at a private interview. Throughout the conversation which then took place, Mr. Blyth had been unusually

quiet, and very much in earnest. The doctor had begun by being incredulous and sarcastic in a good-humoured way; but had ended by speaking seriously, and making a promise under certain conditions. The time for the performance of that promise had now arrived.

"You needn't wait, Vance," said the rector. "Never mind about taking the things away. I'll ring when you're wanted."

Vance gloomily departed.

"Now the young people have left us, Mrs. Peckover," said Doctor Joyce, turning to the clown's wife, "there is a good opportunity for my making a proposition to you, on behalf of my old and dear friend here, Mr. Blyth; who, as you must have noticed, feels great sympathy and fondness for your little Mary. But, before I mention this proposal (which I am sure you will receive in the best spirit, however it may surprise you), I should wish—we should all wish, if you have no objection—to hear any particulars you can give us on the subject of this poor child. Do you feel any reluctance to tell us in confidence whatever you know about her?"

"Oh dear no, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, very much amazed. "I should be ashamed of myself if I went making any objections to anything you wanted to know about little Mary. But I'm amost afraid——"

"There! I knew she wouldn't object," interrupted Valentine, letting his exultation get the better of his self-control. "Excellent soul, I told you, doctor, she wouldn't object——"

"My dear Valentine," interposed the rector, "remember the terms of our agreement. You were to leave me to be spokesman."

"I won't speak another word," cried Mr. Blyth, "upon my honour, I won't speak another word."

"I think you were about to say something more?" continued Doctor Joyce, addressing Mrs. Peckover.

"Oh, nothing particular, if you please, sir," answered the clown's wife, nervously. "I was only afraid like—I know it's very foolish—but it's strange to me to be in a beautiful place like this, drinking wine with gentlefolks—and I was amost afraid——"

"Not afraid, I hope, that you couldn't tell us

what we are so anxious to know, quite at your ease, and in your own way?" said the rector, pleasantly. "Pray, Mrs. Peckover, believe I am sincere in saying that we meet on equal terms here. I have heard from Mr. Blyth of your motherly kindness to that poor helpless child; and I am indeed proud to take your hand, and happy to see you here, as one who should always be an honoured guest in a clergyman's house—the doer of a good and charitable deed. I have always, I hope, valued the station to which it has pleased God to call me, because it especially offers me the privilege of being the friend of all my fellow-Christians, whether richer or poorer, higher or lower in worldly rank, than I am myself."

Mrs. Peckover's eyes began to fill. She could have worshipped Doctor Joyce at that moment.

"Mr. Blyth!" exclaimed Mrs. Joyce, sharply, before another word could be spoken—"excuse me, Mr. Blyth; but really——"

Valentine was trying to pour out a glass of sherry for Mrs. Peckover. His admiration of the doctor's last speech, and his extreme anxiety to reassure the clown's wife, must have interfered

somehow with his precision of eye and hand ; for one half of the wine, as he held the decanter, was dropping into the glass, and the other half was dribbling into a little river on the cloth. Mrs. Joyce thought of the walnut-wood table underneath, and felt half distracted as she spoke. Mrs. Peckover, delighted to be of some use, forgot her company manners in an instant, pulled out her red cotton pocket-handkerchief, and darted at the spilt sherry. But the rector was even quicker with his napkin. Mrs. Peckover's cheeks turned the colour of her handkerchief, as she put it back in her pocket, and sat down again.

"Much obliged—no harm done—much obliged ma'am," said Doctor Joyce. "Now, Valentine, if you don't leave off apologising, and sit down directly in that arm-chair against the wall, I shall take Mrs. Peckover into my study, and hear everything she has to say, at a private interview. There! we are all comfortable and composed again at last, and ready to be told how little Mary and the good friend who has been like a mother to her, first met."

Thus appealed to, Mrs. Peckover began her

narrative; sometimes addressing it to the Doctor, sometimes to Mrs. Joyce, and sometimes to Valentine. From beginning to end, she was only interrupted at rare intervals by a word of encouragement, or sympathy, or surprise, from her audience. Even Mr. Blyth sat most uncharacteristically still and silent; his expression alone showing the varying influences of the story on him, from its strange commencement to its melancholy close.

"It's better than ten years ago, sir," began the clown's wife, speaking first to Doctor Joyce, "since my little Tommy was born; he being now, if you please, at school and costing nothing, through a presentation, as they call it I think, which was given us by a kind patron to my husband. Some time after I had got well over my confinement, I was out one afternoon taking a walk with the baby and Jemmy; which last is my husband, ma'am. We were at Bangbury then, just putting up the circus: it was a fine large neighbourhood, and we hoped to do good business there. Jemmy and me and the baby went into the fields, and enjoyed ourselves very

much; it being such nice warm spring-weather, I remember, though it was March at the time. We came back to Bangbury by the road; and just as we got near the town, we see a young woman sitting on the bank, and holding her baby in her arms, just as I had got my baby in mine.

“How dreadful ill and weak she do look, don’t she?’ says Jemmy. Before I could say as much as ‘Yes,’ she stares up at us, and asks in a wild voice, though it wasn’t very loud either, if we can tell her the way to Bangbury workhouse. Having pretty sharp eyes of our own, we both of us knew that a workhouse was no fit place for her. Her gown was very dusty, and one of her boots was burst, and her hair was draggled all over her face, and her eyes was sunk in her head, like; but we saw somehow that she was a lady—or, if she wasn’t exactly a lady, that no workhouse was proper for her, at any rate. I stooped down to speak to her; but her baby was crying so dreadful she could hardly hear me. ‘Is the poor thing ill?’ says I. ‘Starving,’ says she, in such a desperate, fierce way, that it gave

me quite a turn. 'Is it your child?' says I, a bit frightened about how she'd answer me, but wanting so much to find out that I risked it. 'Yes,' she says in quite a new voice, very soft and sorrowful, and bending her face away from me over the child. 'Then why don't you suckle it,' says I. She looks up at me, and then at Jemmy, and shakes her head, and says nothing. I give my baby to Jemmy to hold, and went and sit down by her. He walked away a little; and I whispers to her again, 'Why don't you suckle it?' and she whispers to me, 'My milk's all dried up.' I couldn't wait to hear no more till I'd got her baby at my own breast.

"That was the first time I suckled little Mary, ma'am. She wasn't a month old then, and, oh, so weak and small! such a mite of a baby compared to mine!

"You may be sure, sir, that I asked the young woman lots of questions, while I was sitting side by side with her. She stared at me with a dazed look in her face, seemingly quite stupified by weariness or grief, or both together. Sometimes she give me an answer and sometimes she

wouldn't. She was very secret. She wouldn't say where she come from, or who her friends were, or what her name was. She said she should never have name or home or friends again. I just quietly stole a look down at her left hand, and saw that there was no wedding-ring on her finger, and guessed what she meant. 'Does the father know you're wandering about in this way?' says I. She flushes up directly; 'No!' says she, 'he doesn't know where I am. He never had any love for me, and he has no pity for me now. God's curse on him wherever he goes!'—'Oh hush! hush!' says I, 'don't talk like that!' 'Why do you ask me questions?' says she more fiercely than ever. 'What business have you to ask me questions that make me mad?' 'I've only got one more to bother you with,' says I, quite cool; 'and that is, havn't you got any money at all with you?' You see, ma'am, now I'd got her child at my own bosom, I didn't care for what she said, or fear for what she might do to me. The poor mite of a baby was sure to be a peacemaker between us, sooner or later.

"It turned out she'd got sixpence and a few half-pence—not a farthing more, and too proud to ask help from any one of her friends. I managed to worm out of her that she had run away from home before her confinement, and had gone to some strange place to be confined, where they'd ill-treated and robbed her. She hadn't long got away from the wretches who'd done it. By the time I'd found out all this, her baby was quite quiet, and ready to go to sleep. I gave it her back. She said nothing; but took and kissed my hand, her lips feeling like burning coals on my flesh. 'You're kindly welcome,' says I, a little flustered at such a queer way o' thanking me. 'Just wait a bit, while I speak to my husband.' Though she'd been and done wrong, I couldn't for the life of me help pitying her, for all her fierce ways. She was so young, and so forlorn and ill, and had such a beautiful face (little Mary's is the image of it, specially about the eyes), and seemed so like a lady, that it was almost a sin, as I thought, to send her to such a place as a workhouse.

"Well: I went and told Jemmy all I had got

out of her—my own baby kicking and crowing in my arms again, as happy as a king, all the time I was speaking. ‘It seems shocking,’ says I, ‘to let such as her go into a workhouse. What had we better do?’—Says Jemmy, ‘Let’s take her with us to the circus and ask Peggy Burke.’

“Peggy Burke, if you please sir, was the finest rider that ever stepped on a horse’s back. . We’ve had nothing in our circus to come near her, since she went to Astley’s. She was the wildest devil of an Irish girl—oh ! I humbly beg your pardon, sir, for saying such a word ; but she really was so wild, I hope you’ll excuse it. She’d go through fire and water, as they say, to serve people she liked ; but as for them she didn’t, she’d often use her riding-whip among ’em as free as her tongue. That cowardly brute Jubber would never have beaten my little Mary, if Peggy had been with us still ! He was so frightened of her that she could twist him round her finger ; and she did, for he durstn’t quarrel with the best rider in England, and let other circuses get hold of her. Peggy was a wonderful sharp girl

besides, and was always fond of me, and took my part; so when Jemmy said he thought it best to ask her what we had better do, you may be sure that I thought it best too. We took the young woman and the baby with us to the circus at once. She never asked any questions; she didn't seem to care where she went, or what she did; she was dazed and desperate—a sight, Ma'am, to make your heart ache.

“They were just getting tea in the circus, which was nearly finished. We mostly tea and dinner there, sir; finding it come cheaper in the end to mess together when we can. Peggy Burke, I remember, was walking about on the grass outside, whistling (that was one of her queer ways) ‘The girl I left behind me.’ ‘Ah! Peck,’ says she, ‘what have you been after now? Who’s the company lady ye’ve brought to tea with us?’ I told her, sir, all I’ve just told you; while Jemmy set the young woman down on one of our trunks, and got her a cup of tea. ‘It seems dreadful,’ says I when I’d done, ‘to send such as her to the workhouse, don’t it?’ ‘Workhouse!’ says Peggy, firing up directly; ‘I only

wish we could catch the man who's got her into the scrape, and put him in there on water-gruel for the rest of his life. I'd give a shillin' a wheal out of my own pocket for the blessed privilege of scoring his thief's face with my whip, till his own mother wouldn't know him !' And then she went on, sir, abusing all the men in her Irish way, which I can't repeat. At last she stops, and claps me on the back. 'You're a darlin' old girl, Peck !' says she, 'and your friends are my friends. Stop where you are, and let me speak a word to the young woman on the trunk.'

"After a little while she comes back, and says, 'I've done it, Peck ! She's mighty close ; and as proud as Lucifer ; but she's only a dressmaker, for all that.' 'A dressmaker !' says I ; 'how did you find out she was a dressmaker ?' 'Why, I looked at her forefinger, in course,' says Peggy, 'and saw the pricks of the needle on it, and soon made her talk a bit after that. She knows fancy-work and cuttin' out—would ye ever have thought it ? And I'll show her how to give the workhouse the go-by to-morrow, if she only holds out, and keeps in her senses. Stop where you

are, Peck ! I'm going to make Jubber put his dirty hand into his pocket and pull out some money ; and that's a sight worth stoppin' to see any day in the week.'

"I waited as she told me ; and she called for Jubber, just as if he'd been her servant ; and he come out of the circus. 'I want ten shillings advance of wages for that lady on the trunk,' says Peggy. He laughed at her. 'Show your ugly teeth at me again,' says she, 'and I'll box your ears. I've my light hand for a horse's mouth, and my heavy hand for a man's cheek ; you ought to know that by this time ! Pull out the ten shillings.' 'What for ?' says he, frowning at her. 'Just this,' says she. 'I mean to leave your circus, unless I get those six character dresses you promised me ; and the lady there can do them up beautiful. Pull out the ten shillings ! for I've made up my mind to appear before the Bangbury public on Garryowen's back, as six women at once.'

"What she meant by this, sir, was that she was to have six different dresses on, one over another ; and was to go galloping round the

ring on Garryowen (which was a horse), beginning, I think it was, as Empress of Roossia; and then throwing off the top dress without the horse stopping, and showing next as some famous Frenchwoman, in the dress underneath; and keeping on so with different nations, till she got down to the last dress, which was to be Britannia and the Union-Jack. We'd got bits of remnants, and old dresses and things to make and alter, but hadn't anybody clever enough at cutting out, and what they call 'Costoom,' to do what Peggy wanted—Jubber being too stingy to pay the regular people who understand such things. The young woman, knowing as she did about fancy work, was just what was wanted, if she could only get well enough to use her needle. 'I'll see she works the money out,' says Peggy; 'but she's dead beat to-night, and must have her rest and bit o' supper, before she begins to-morrow.' Jubber wanted to give less than ten shillings; but between threatening and saying it should buy twenty shillings' worth of tailor's work, she got the better of him. And he gave the money, sulky enough.

“‘Now,’ says Peggy, ‘you take her away, and get her a lodging in the place where you’re staying; and I’ll come to-morrow with some of the things to make up.’ But, ah dear me, sir, she was never to work as much as sixpence of that ten shillings out. She was took bad in the night, and got so much worse in the morning that we had to send for the doctor.

“As soon as he’d seen her, he takes me into the passage, and says he to me, ‘Do you know who her friends are?’ ‘No, sir,’ says I; ‘I can’t get her to tell me. I only met her by accident yesterday.’ ‘Try and find out again,’ says he; ‘for I’m afraid she won’t live over the night. I’ll come back in the evening and see if there is any change.’

“Peggy and me went into her room together; but we couldn’t even get her to speak to us for ever so long a time. All at once she cries out; ‘I can’t see things as I ought. Where’s the woman who suckled my baby when I was alone by the roadside?’ ‘Here,’ says I—‘here; I’ve got hold of your hand. Do tell us where we can write to about you.’ ‘Will you promise to take

care of my baby, and not let it go into the work-house?' says she. 'Yes, I promise,' says I; 'I do indeed promise with my whole heart.' 'We'll all take care of the baby,' says Peggy; 'only you try and cheer up, and you'll get well enough to see me on Garryowen's back, before we leave Bangbury—you will for certain, if you cheer up a bit.' 'I give my baby,' she says, clutching tight at my hand, 'to the woman who suckled it by the roadside; and I pray God to bless *her* and forgive *me*, for Jesus Christ's sake.' After that, she lay quite quiet for a minute or two. Then she says faintly, 'Its name's to be Mary. Put it into bed to me again; I should like to touch its cheek, and feel how soft and warm it is, once more.' And I took the baby out of its crib, and lifted it, asleep as it was, into the bed by her side, and guided her hand up to its cheek. I saw her lips move a little; and bent down over her. 'Give me one kiss,' she whispers, 'before I die.' And I kissed her, and tried to stop crying as I did it. Then I says to Peggy, 'You wait here while I run and fetch the doctor back; for I'm afraid she's going fast.'

He wasn't at home when I got to his house. I didn't know what to do next, when I see a gentleman in the street who looked like a clergyman, and I asked him if he was one; and he said 'Yes;' and he went back with me. I heard a low wailing and crying in the room, and saw Peggy sitting on the bundle of dresses she'd brought in the morning, rocking herself backwards and forwards as Irish people always do when they're crying. I went to the bed, and looked through the curtains. The baby was still sleeping as pretty as ever, and its mother's hand was touching one of its arms. I was just going to speak to her again, when the clergyman said 'Hush,' and took a bit of looking-glass that was set up on the chimney-piece, and held it over her lips. She was gone. Her poor white wasted hand lay dead on the living baby's arm.

"I answered all the clergyman's questions quite straight forward, telling him everything I knew from beginning to end. When I'd done, Peggy starts up from the bundle, and says, 'Mind, sir, whatever you do, the child's not to be took away from this person here, and sent to the

workhouse. The mother give it to her on that very bed, and I'm a witness of it.' 'And I promised to be a mother to the baby, sir,' says I. He turns round to me, and praises me for what I done, and says nobody shall take it away from me, unless them as can show their right comes forward to claim it. 'But now,' says he, 'we must think of other things. We must try and find out something about this poor woman who has died in such a melancholy way.'

"It was easier to say that than to do it. The poor thing had nothing with her but a change of linen for herself and the child, and that gave us no clue. Then we searched her pocket. There was a cambric handkerchief in it, marked 'M.G.'; and some bits of rusks to sop for the child; and the sixpence and half-pence which she had when I met her; and beneath all, in a corner as if it had been forgotten there, a small Hair Bracelet. It was made of two kinds of hair—very little of one kind, and a good deal of the other. And on the flat clasp of the bracelet there was cut in tiny letters, '*In memory of S.G.*' I remember all this,

sir, for I've often and often looked at the bracelet since that time.

"We found nothing more; no letters, or cards, or anything. The clergyman said that the 'M.G.' on the handkerchief must be the initials of her name; and the 'S.G.' on the bracelet must mean, he thought, some relation whose hair she wore as a sort of keepsake. I remember Peggy and me wondering which was S.G.'s hair; and who the other person might be, whose hair was wove into the bracelet. But the clergyman he soon cut us short by asking for pen, ink, and paper directly. 'I'm going to write out an advertisement,' says he, 'saying how you met with the young woman, and what she was like, and how she was dressed.' 'Do you mean to say anything about the baby, sir?' says I. 'Certainly,' says he, 'it's only right if we get at her friends by advertising, to give them the chance of doing something for the child. And if they live any where in this county, I believe we shall find them out; for the *Bangbury Chronicle*, into which I mean to put the advertisement, goes everywhere in our part of England.'

“So he sits down, and writes what he said he would, and takes it away to be printed in the next day’s number of the newspaper. ‘If nothing comes of this,’ says he, ‘I think I can manage about the burial with a charitable society here. I’ll take care and inform you the moment the advertisement’s answered.’ I hardly know how it was, sir; but I almost hoped they wouldn’t answer it. Having suckled the baby myself, and kissed its mother before she died, I couldn’t make up my mind to the chance of its being took away from me just then. I ought to have thought how poor we were, and how hard it would be for us to bring the child up. But, somehow, I never did think of that—no more did Peggy—no more did Jemmy; not even when we put the baby to bed that night along with our own.

“Well, sir, sure enough, two days after the advertisement come out, it was answered in the cruellest letter I ever set eyes on. The clergyman he come to me with it. ‘It was left this evening,’ says he, ‘by a strange messenger, who went away directly. I told my servant to follow him, but it was too late—he was out of sight.’ The letter

was very short, and we thought it was in a woman's handwriting—a feigned handwriting the clergyman said. There was no name signed, and no date at top or bottom. Inside it there was a ten pound bank-note; and the person as sent it, wrote that it was enclosed to bury the young woman decently. 'She was better dead than alive'—the letter went on—'after having disgraced her father and her relations. As for the child, it was the child of sin; and had no claim on people who desired to preserve all that was left of their good name, and to set a moral example to others. The parish must support it if nobody else would. It would be useless to attempt to trace them, or to advertise again. The baby's father had disappeared: they didn't know where; and could hold no communication now with such a monster of wickedness, even if they did. She was dead in her shame and her sin; and her name should never be mentioned among them she belonged to, henceforth for ever.'

"This was what I remember in the letter, sir. A shocking and unchristian letter, I said; and the clergyman he said so, too.

"She was buried in the poor corner of the churchyard. They marked out the place, in case anybody should ever want to see it, by cutting the two letters M.G., and the date of when she died, upon a board of wood at the head of the grave. The clergyman then give me the hair bracelet and the handkerchief; and said, 'you keep these as careful as you keep the child, for they may be of great importance one of these days. I shall seal up the letter (which is addressed to me) and put it in my strong box.' He'd asked me, before this, if I'd thought of what a responsibility it was for such as me to provide for the baby. And I told him I'd promised, and would keep my promise, and trust to God's providence for the rest. The clergyman was a very kind gentleman, and got up a subscription for the poor babe; and Peggy Burke, when she had her benefit before the circus left Bangbury, give half of what she got as *her* subscription. I never heard nothing about the child's friends from that time to this; and I know no more who its father is now than I did then. And glad I am that he's never come forward—though, perhaps, I oughtn't

to say so. I keep the hair bracelet and the handkerchief as careful as the clergyman told me, for the mother's sake as well as the child's. I've known some sorrow with her since I took her as my own : but I love her only the dearer for it, and still think the day a happy day for both of us, when I first stopped and suckled her by the road-side.

"This is all I have to say, if you please, sir, about how I first met with little Mary ; and I wish I could have told it in a way that was more fit for such as you to hear."

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY.—PART SECOND.

As the clown's wife ended her narrative, but little was said in the way of comment on it, by those who had listened to her. They were too much affected by what they had heard, to speak, as yet, except briefly and in low voices. Mrs. Joyce more than once raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Her husband murmured some cordial words of sympathy and thanks—in an unusually subdued manner, however. Valentine said nothing; but he drew his chair close to Mrs. Peckover, and turning his face away as if he did not wish it to be seen, took her hand in one of his and patted it gently with the other. There was now perfect silence in the room for a few minutes. Then they all looked out with one

accord, and as it seemed with one feeling, towards the garden.

In a shady place, just visible among the trees, the rector's daughters, and little Mary, and the great Newfoundland dog were all sitting together on the grass. The two young ladies appeared to be fastening a garland of flowers round the child's neck, while she was playfully offering a nosegay for Leo to smell at. The sight was homely and simple enough; but it was full of the tenderest interest—after the narrative which had just engaged them—to those who now witnessed it. They looked out on the garden scene silently for some little time. Mrs. Joyce was the first to speak again.

“Would it be asking too much of you, Mrs. Peckover,” said she, “to enquire how the poor little thing really met with the accident that caused her misfortune? I know there is an account of it in the bills of the circus, but——”

“It's the most infamous and disgusting thing I ever read!” interrupted Mr. Blyth indignantly. “The man who wrote it ought to be put in the pillory. I never remember wanting to throw a

rotten egg at any of my fellow-creatures before—but I feel certain that I should enjoy having a shy at Mr. Jubber ! ”

“ Gently, Valentine—gently,” interposed the rector. “ I think, my love,” he continued, turning to Mrs. Joyce, “ that it is hardly considerate to Mrs. Peckover to expect her to comply with your request. She has already sacrificed herself once to our curiosity ; and, really, to ask her now to recur a second time to recollections which I am sure must distress her——”

“ It’s worse than distressing, indeed, sir, even to think of that dreadful accident,” said Mrs. Peckover, “ and specially as I can’t help taking some blame to myself for it. But if the lady wishes to know how it happened, I’m sure I’m agreeable to tell her. People in our way of life, ma’am—as I’ve often heard Peggy Burke say—are obliged to dry the tear at their eyes, long before it’s gone from their hearts. But pray don’t think, sir, I mean that now, about myself, and in your company. If I *do* feel low at talking of little Mary’s misfortune, I can take a look out

into the garden there, and see how happy she is—and that's safe to set me right again."

"I ought to tell you first, sir," proceeded the clown's wife, after waiting thoughtfully for a moment or two before she spoke again, "that I got on much better with little Mary than ever I thought I should, for the first six years of her life. She grew up so pretty, that gentlefolks was always noticing her, and asking about her; and nearly in every place the circus went to they made her presents, which helped nicely in her keep and clothing. And our own people too, petted her and were fond of her. All those six years we got on as pleasantly as could be; it was not till she was near her seventh birth-day, that I was wicked and foolish enough to consent to her being shown in the performances.

"I was sorely tried and tempted before I did consent. Jubber first said he wanted her to perform with the riders, and I said 'No,' at once—though I was awful frightened of him in those days. But soon after, Jemmy (who wasn't the clown then that he is now, sir; there was others to be got for his money, to do what he did at

that time)—Jemmy comes to me, saying he's afraid he shall lose his place, if I don't give in about Mary. This staggered me a good deal; for I don't know what we should have done then, if my husband had lost his engagement. And, besides, there was the poor dear child herself, who was mad to be carried up in the air on horse-back; always begging and praying to be made a little rider of. And all the rest of 'em in the circus worried and laughed at me; and, in short, I give in at last against my conscience, but I couldn't help it.

“I made a bargain though, that she should only be trusted to the steadiest, soberest man, and the best rider of the whole lot. They called him ‘Muley’ in the bills, and stained his face to make him look like a Turk, or something of that sort; but his real name was Francis Yapp, and a very good fatherly sort of man he was in his way, having a family of his own to look after. He used to ride splendid, at full straddle, with three horses under him—one foot, you know, sir, being on the outer horse's back, and one foot on the inner. Him and Jubber made it out together

that he was to act a wild man, flying for his life across some desert, with his only child, and poor little Mary was to be the child. They darkened her face to look like his; and put an outlandish kind of white dress on her; and buckled a red belt round her waist, with a sort of handle in it for Yapp to hold her by. After first making believe in all sorts of ways, that him and the child was in danger of being taken and shot, he had to make believe afterwards that they had escaped; and to hold her up, in a sort of triumph, at the full stretch of his arm—galloping round and round the ring all the while. He was a tremendous strong man, and could do it as easy as I could hold up a bit of that plum cake.

“Poor little love! she soon got over the first fright of the thing, and had a sort of mad fondness for it that I never liked to see, for it wasn’t natural to her. Yapp, he said, she’d got the heart of a lion, and would grow up the finest woman-rider in the world. I was very unhappy about it, and lived a miserable life, always fearing some accident. But for some time, nothing near an accident happened; and lots of money come into

the circus to see Yapp and little Mary—but that was Jubber's luck and not ours. One night—she was a little better than seven year old——

“Oh, ma'am, how I ever lived over that dreadful night I don't know! I was a sinful miserable wretch not to have starved sooner than let the child go into danger; but I was so sorely tempted and driven to it, God knows!—No, sir! no, ma'am; and many thanks for your kindness, I'll go on now I've begun. Don't mind me crying; I'll manage to tell it somehow. The strap—no, I mean the handle; the handle in the strap give way all of a sudden—just at the last too! just at the worst time, when he couldn't catch her!——

“Never—oh, never, never, to my dying day shall I forget the horrible screech that went up from the whole audience; and the sight of the white thing lying huddled dead-still on the boards! We hadn't such a number in as usual that night; and she fell on an empty place between the benches. I got knocked down by the horses in running to her—I was clean out of my senses—and didn't know where I was going

—Yapp had fallen among them, and hurt himself badly, trying to catch her—they were running wild in the ring—the horses was—frantic-like with the noise all round them. I got up somehow, and a crowd of people jostled me, and I saw my innocent darling carried among them. I felt hands on me, trying to pull me back; but I broke away, and got into the waiting-room along with the rest.

“There she was—my own, own little Mary, that I’d promised her poor mother to take care of—there she was, lying all white and still on an old box, with my cloak rolled up as a pillow for her. And people crowding round her. And a doctor feeling her head all over. And Yapp among them, held up by two men, with his face all over blood. I wasn’t able to speak or move; I didn’t feel as if I was breathing even, till the doctor stopped, and looked up; and then a great shudder went through all of us together, as if we’d been one body, instead of twenty or more.

“‘It’s not killed her,’ says the doctor. ‘Her brain’s escaped injury.’

“I didn’t hear another word.

"I don't know how long it was before I seemed to wake up like, with a dreadful feeling of pain and tearing of everything inside me. I was on the landlady's bed, and Jemmy was standing over me with a bottle of salts. 'They've put her to bed,' he says to me, 'and the doctor's setting her arm.' I didn't recollect at first; but when I did, it was almost as bad as seeing the dreadful accident all over again.

"It was some time before any of us found out what had really happened. The breaking of her arm, the doctor said, had saved her head; which was only cut and bruised a little, not half as bad as was feared. Day after day, and night after night, I sat by her bedside, comforting her through her fever, and the pain of the splints on her arm, and never once suspecting—no more I believe than she did—the awful misfortune that had really happened. She was always wonderful quiet and silent for a child, poor lamb, in little illnesses that she'd had before; and, somehow, I didn't wonder—at least, at first—why she never said a word, and never answered me when I spoke to her.

“This went on, though, after she got better in her health; and a strange look come over her eyes. They seemed to be always wondering, and frightened in a confused way about something or other. She took, too, to rolling her head about restlessly from one side of the pillow to the other; making a sort of muttering and humming now and then, but still never seeming to notice or to care for anything I said to her. One day, I was warming her a nice cup of beef-tea over the fire, when I heard, quite sudden and quite plain, these words from where she lay on the bed,—‘Why are you always so quiet here? Why doesn’t somebody speak to me?’

“I knew there wasn’t another soul in the room but the poor child at that time; and yet, the voice as spoke those words was no more like little Mary’s voice, than my voice, sir, is like yours. It sounded, somehow, hoarse and low, and deep and faint, all at the same time; the strangest, shockingest voice to come from a child, who always used to speak so clearly and prettily before, that ever I heard. If I was only cleverer with my words, ma’am, and could tell you about

it properly—but I can't. I only know it gave me such a turn to hear her, that I upset the beef-tea, and ran back in a fright to the bed. 'Why, Mary! Mary!' says I, quite loud, 'are you so well already that you're trying to imitate Mr. Jubber's gruff voice?'

"There was the same wondering look in her eyes—only wilder than I had ever seen it yet—while I was speaking. When I'd done, she says in the same strange way, 'Speak out, mother; I can't hear you when you whisper like that.' She was as long saying these words, and bungled over them as much, as if she was only just learning to speak. I think I got the first suspicion then, of what had really happened. 'Mary!' I bawled out as loud as I could, 'Mary! can't you hear me now?' She shook her head, and stared up at me with the frightened bewildered look again: then seemed to get pettish and impatient all of a sudden—the first time I ever saw her so—and hid her face from me on the pillow.

"Just then the doctor come in. 'Oh, sir!' says I, whispering to him—just as if I hadn't found out a minute ago that she couldn't hear

me at the top of my voice—‘I’m afraid there’s something gone wrong with her hearing —.’ ‘Have you only just now suspected that?’ says he; ‘I’ve been afraid of it for some days past, but I thought it best to say nothing till I’d tried her; and she’s hardly well enough yet, poor child, to be worried with experiments on her ears.’ ‘She’s much better,’ says I; ‘indeed, she’s much better to-day, sir! Oh, do try her now, for it’s so dreadful to be in doubt a moment longer than we can help.’

“He went up to the bedside, and I followed him. She was lying with her face hidden away from us on the pillow, just as it was when I left her. The doctor says to me, ‘Don’t disturb her, don’t let her look round, so that she can see us—I’m going to call to her.’ And he called ‘Mary’ out loud, twice; and she never moved. The third time he tried her, it was with such a shout at the top of his voice, that the landlady come up, thinking something had happened. I was looking over his shoulder, and saw that my dear child never started in the least. ‘Poor little thing,’ says the doctor, quite sorrowful, ‘this is

worse than I expected.' He stooped down and touched her, as he said this; and she turned round directly, and put out her hand to have her pulse felt as usual. I tried to get out of her sight, for I was crying, and didn't wish her to see it; but she was too sharp for me. She looked hard in my face and the landlady's, then in the doctor's, which was downcast enough; for he had got very fond of her, just as everybody else did who saw much of little Mary.

" 'What's the matter?' she says, in the same sort of strange unnatural voice again. We tried to pacify her; but only made her worse. 'Why do you keep on whispering?' she asks. 'Why don't you speak out loud, so that I can—,' and then she stopped, seemingly in a sort of helpless fright and bewilderment. She tried to get up in bed, and her face turned red all over. 'Can she read writing?' says the doctor. 'Oh, yes, sir,' says I; 'she can read and write beautiful for a child of her age; my husband taught her. 'Get me paper and pen and ink directly,' says he to the landlady; who went at once and got him what he wanted. 'We must quiet her at all

hazards,' says the doctor, 'or she'll excite herself into another attack of fever. She feels what's the matter with her, but don't understand it; and I'm going to tell her by means of this paper. It's a risk,' he says, writing down on the paper in large letters, *You Are Deaf*; 'but I must try all I can do for her ears immediately; and this will prepare her,' says he, going to the bed, and holding the paper before her eyes.

"She shrank back on the pillow, as still as death, the instant she saw it; but didn't cry, and looked more puzzled and astonished, I should say, than distressed. But she was breathing dreadful quick—I felt that, as I stooped down and kissed her. 'She's too young,' says the doctor, to know what the extent of her calamity really is. You stop here and keep her quiet till I come back, for I trust the case is not hopeless yet.' 'But whatever has made her deaf, sir?' says the landlady, opening the door for him. 'The shock of that fall in the circus,' says he, going out in a very great hurry. I thought I should never have held up my head again, as I heard them words, looking at little Mary, with my arm round her neck all the time,

“Well, sir, the doctor come back; and he syringed her ears first—and that did no good. Then he tried blistering, and then he put on leeches; and still it was no use. ‘I’m afraid it is a hopeless case,’ says he; ‘but there’s a doctor who’s had more practice than I’ve had with deaf people, who comes from where he lives to our Dispensary once a week. To-morrow’s his day, and I’ll bring him here with me.’

“And he did bring this gentleman, as he promised he would—an old gentleman, with such a pleasant way of speaking that I understood everything he said to me directly. ‘I’m afraid you must make up your mind to the worst,’ says he. ‘I have been hearing about the poor child from my friend who’s attended her; and I’m sorry to say I don’t think there’s much hope.’ Then he goes to the bed and looks at her. ‘Ah,’ says he, ‘there’s just the same expression in her face that I remember seeing in a mason’s boy—a patient of mine—who fell off a ladder, and lost his hearing altogether by the shock. You don’t hear what I’m saying, do you, my dear?’ says he in a hearty cheerful way. ‘You don’t hear me saying that

you're the prettiest little girl I ever saw in my life?' She looked up at him confused, and quite silent. He didn't speak to her again, but told me to turn her on the bed, so that he could get at one of her ears.

"He pulled out some instruments, while I did what he asked, and put them into her ear, but so tenderly that he never hurt her. Then he looked in, through a sort of queer spy-glass thing. Then he did it all over again with the other ear; and then he laid down the instruments and pulled out his watch. 'Write on a piece of paper,' says he to the other doctor: '*Do you know that the watch is ticking?*' When this was done, he makes signs to little Mary to open her mouth, and puts as much of his watch in as would go between her teeth, while the other doctor holds up the paper before her. When he took the watch out again, she shook her head, and said, 'No,' just in the same strange voice as ever. The old gentleman didn't speak a word as he put the watch back in his fob; but I saw by his face that he thought it was all over with her hearing, after what had just happened.

“‘Oh, try and do something for her, sir!’ says I. ‘Oh, for God’s sake, don’t give her up, sir!’ ‘My good soul,’ says he, ‘You must set her an example of cheerfulness, and keep up her spirits—that’s all that can be done for her now.’ ‘Not *all*, sir,’ says I, ‘surely not *all*!’ ‘Indeed it is,’ says he; ‘her hearing’s completely gone; the experiment with my watch proves it. I had an exactly similar case with the mason’s boy,’ he says, turning to the other doctor. ‘The shock of that fall has, I believe, paralysed the auditory nerve in her, as it did in him.’ I remember those words exactly, sir, though I didn’t quite understand them at the time. But he explained himself to me very kindly; telling me over again, in a plain way, what he’d just told the doctor. He reminded me, too, that the remedies which had been already tried had been of no use; and told me I might feel sure that any others would only end in the same way, and put her to useless pain into the bargain. ‘I hope,’ says he, ‘the poor child is too young to suffer much mental misery under her dreadful misfortune. Keep her amused, and keep her talking, if you possibly can—though I doubt very

much whether, in a little time, you wont fail completely in getting her to speak at all.'

" 'Don't say that sir,' says I; 'don't say she'll be dumb as well as deaf; it's enough to break one's heart only to think of it.' 'But I *must* say so,' says he; 'for I'm afraid it's the truth.' And then he asks me whether I hadn't noticed already that she was unwilling to speak; and that, when she did speak, her voice wasn't the same voice it used to be. I said 'Yes,' to that; and asked him whether the fall had had anything to do with it. He said, taking me up very short, it had everything to do with it, because the fall had made her, what they call, stone deaf, which prevented her from hearing the sound of her own voice. So it was changed, he told me, because she had no ear now to guide herself by in speaking, and couldn't know in the least whether the few words she said were spoken soft or loud, or deep or clear. 'So far as the poor child herself is concerned,' says he, 'she might as well be without a voice at all; for she has nothing but her memory left to tell her that she has one.'

"I burst out a-crying as he said this; for

somehow I'd never thought of anything so dreadful before. 'I've been a little too sudden in telling you the worst, haven't I?' says the old gentleman kindly; 'but you must be taught how to make up your mind to meet the full extent of this misfortune for the sake of the child, whose future comfort and happiness depend greatly on you.' And then he bid me keep up her reading and writing, and force her to use her voice as much as I could, by every means in my power. He told me I should find her grow more and more unwilling to speak every day, just for the shocking reason that she couldn't hear a single word she said, or a single tone of her own voice. He warned me that she was already losing the wish and the want to speak; and that it would very soon be little short of absolute pain to her to be made to say even a few words; but he begged and prayed me not to let my good-nature get the better of my prudence on that account, and not to humour her, however I might feel tempted to do so—for if I did, she would be dumb as well as deaf most certainly. He told me my own common sense would show me the reason why; but I

suppose I was too distressed or too stupid to understand things as I ought. He had to explain it to me in so many words, that if she wasn't constantly exercised in speaking, she would lose her power of speech altogether, for want of practice—just the same as if she'd been born dumb. 'So, once again,' says he, 'mind you make her use her voice. Don't give her her dinner, unless she asks for it. Treat her severely in that way, poor little soul, because it's for her own good.'

"It was all very well for *him* to say that, but it was impossible for *me* to do it. The dear child, ma'am, seemed to get used to her misfortune, except when we tried to make her speak. It was the saddest, prettiest sight in the world to see how patiently and bravely she bore with her hard lot from the first. As she grew better in her health, she kept up her reading, and writing quite cleverly with my husband and me; and all her nice natural cheerful ways come back to her just the same as ever. I've read or heard somewhere, sir, about God's goodness in tempering the wind to the shorn lamb. I don't know who said that

first; but it might well have been spoken on account of my own darling little Mary, in those days. Instead of us being the first to comfort her, it was she that was first to comfort us. And so she's gone on ever since—bless her heart! Only treat her kindly, and, in spite of her misfortune, she's the merriest, happiest little thing—the easiest pleased and amused, I do believe; that ever lived.

“If we were wrong in not forcing her to speak more than we did, I must say this much for me and my husband, that we hadn't the heart to make her miserable and keep on tormenting her from morning to night, when she was always happy and comfortable if we would only let her alone. We tried our best for some time to do what the gentleman told us; but it's so hard—as you've found I dare say, ma'am—not to end by humouring them you love! I never see the tear in her eye, except when we forced her to speak to us; and then she always cried, and was fretful and out of sorts for the whole day. It seemed such a dreadful difficulty and pain to her to say only two or three words; and the shocking

husky moaning voice that sounded somehow as if it didn't belong to her never changed. My husband first give up worrying her to speak. He practised her with her book and writing, but let her have her own will in everything else; and he taught her all sorts of tricks on the cards, for amusement, which was a good way of keeping her going with her reading and her pen pleasantly, by reason, of course, of him and her being obliged to put down everything they had to say to each other on a little slate that we bought for her after she got well.

"It was Mary's own notion, if you please, ma'am, to have the slate always hanging at her side. Poor dear! she thought it quite a splendid ornament, and was as proud of it as could be. Jemmy, being neat-handed at such things, did the frame over for her prettily with red morocco, and got our property-man to do it all round with a bright golden border. And then we hung it at her side, with a nice little bit of silk cord—just as you see it now.

"I held out in making her speak some time after my husband: but at last I give in too. I

know it was wrong and selfish of me; but I got a fear that she wouldn't like me as well as she used to do, and would take more kindly to Jemmy than to me, if I went on. Oh, how happy she was the first day I wrote down on her slate that I wouldn't worry her about speaking any more! She jumped up on my knees—being always as nimble as a squirrel—and kissed me over and over again with all her heart. For the rest of the day she run about the room, and all over the house, like a mad thing, and when Jemmy come home at night from performing, she would get out of bed and romp with him, and ride pickaback on him, and try and imitate the funny faces she'd seen him make in the ring. I do believe, sir, that was the first regular happy night we had all had together, since the dreadful time when she met with her accident.

“Long after that, my conscience was uneasy though, at times, about giving in as I had. At last, I got a chance of speaking to another doctor about little Mary; and he told me that if we had kept her up in her speaking ever so severely, it would still have been a pain and a difficulty to

her to say her words, to her dying day. He said too, that he felt sure—though he couldn't explain it to me—that people afflicted with such stone deafness as hers didn't feel the loss of speech, because they never had the want to use their speech; and that they took to making signs, and writing, and such like, quite kindly as a sort of second nature to them. This comforted me, and settled my mind a good deal. I hope in God what the gentleman said was true; for if I was in fault in letting her have her own way and be happy, it's past mending by this time. For more than two years, ma'am, I've never heard her say a single word, no more than if she'd been born dumb, and it's my belief that all the doctors in the world couldn't make her speak now.

"Perhaps, sir, you might wish to know how she first come to show her tricks on the cards in the circus. There was no danger in her doing that, I know—and yet I'd have given almost everything I have, not to let her be shown about as she is. But I was threatened again, in the vilest, wickedest way—I hardly know how to tell

it, gentlemen, in the presence of such as you—Jubber, you must know—”

Just as Mrs. Peckover, with very painful hesitation, pronounced the last words, the hall clock of the Rectory struck two. She heard it, and stopped instantly.

“Oh, if you please, sir, was that two o’clock?” she asked, starting up with a look of alarm.

“Yes, Mrs. Peckover,” said the rector; “but really after having been indebted to you for so much that has deeply interested and affected us, we can’t possibly think of letting you and little Mary leave the Rectory yet.”

“Indeed we must, sir; and many thanks to you for wanting to keep us longer,” said Mrs. Peckover. “What I was going to say isn’t much; it’s quite as well you shouldn’t hear it—and indeed, indeed, ma’am, we must go directly. I told this gentleman here, Mr. Blyth, when I come in, that I’d stolen to you unawares, under pretence of taking little Mary out for a walk. If we are not back to the two o’clock dinner in the circus, it’s unknown what Jubber may not do. He’s the cruellest tyrant—this gentleman

will tell you how infamously he treated the poor child last night—we must go, sir, for her sake ; or else—”

“ Stop ! ” cried Valentine, all his suppressed excitability bursting bounds in an instant, as he took Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and pressed her back into her chair. “ Stop !—hear me ; I must speak—it’s no use shaking your head and frowning at me, doctor—I must speak, or I shall go out of my senses ! Don’t interrupt me, Mrs. Peckover ; you shan’t get up—no, you good, excellent, kind-hearted soul, you shan’t get up ! Look here ; you must never take that little angel of a child near Jubber again—no, never ! By heavens ! if I thought he was likely to touch her any more, I should go mad, and murder him !—Let me alone, doctor ! I beg Mrs. Joyce’s pardon for behaving like this ; I’ll never do it again. Be quiet, all of you ! I *must* take the child home with me—oh, Mrs. Peckover, don’t, don’t say no ! I’ll make her as happy as the day is long. I’ve no child of my own : I’ll watch over her, and love her, and teach her all my life. I’ve got a poor, suffering, bed-ridden

wife at home, who would think such a companion as little Mary the greatest blessing God could send her. My own dear, patient Lavinie! Oh, doctor, doctor! think how kind Lavinie would be to that afflicted little child; and try if you can't make Mrs. Peckover consent. I can't speak any more—I know I'm wrong to burst out in this way; and I beg all your pardons for it, I do indeed! Speak to her, doctor—pray speak to her directly, if you don't want to make me miserable for the rest of my life!"

With these words, Valentine darted precipitately into the garden, and made straight for the spot where the little girls were still sitting together in their shady resting-place among the trees.

The clown's wife had sat very pale and very quiet, under the whole overwhelming torrent of Mr. Blyth's apostrophes, exclamations, and entreaties. She seemed quite unable to speak, after he was fairly gone; and only looked round in a very bewildered way at the rector, with fear as well as amazement expressed vividly in her hearty, healthy face.

"Pray compose yourself, Mrs. Peckover," said Doctor Joyce; "and kindly give me your best attention to what I am about to say. Let me beg you, in the first place, to excuse Mr. Blyth's odd behaviour, which I see has startled and astonished you. He has an unusually excitable nature, which makes him quite incapable of preserving his self-control whenever his feelings are greatly interested on any subject. But, however wildly he may talk, I assure you he means honourably and truthfully in all that he says. You will understand this better if you will let me temperately explain to you the proposal, which he has just made so abruptly and confusedly in his own words."

"Proposal, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover faintly, looking more frightened than ever—"Proposal! Oh, sir! you don't mean to say that you're going to ask me to part from little Mary?"

"I will ask you to do nothing that your own good sense and kind heart may not approve," answered the rector. "In plain terms then, and not to waste time by useless words of preface,

my friend, Mr. Blyth, feels such admiration for your little Mary, and such a desire to help her as far as may be, in her great misfortune, that he is willing and eager to make her future prospects in life his own peculiar care, by adopting her as his daughter. This offer, though coming, as I am aware, from a perfect stranger, can hardly astonish you, I think, if you reflect on the unusually strong claims which the child has to the compassion and kindness of all her fellow-creatures. Other strangers, as you have told us, have shown the deepest interest in her on many occasions; it is not therefore at all wonderful that a gentleman, whose sensitively affectionate nature, and whose Christian integrity of motive I have had ample opportunities of testing during a friendship of nearly twenty years, should prove the sincerity of his admiration for the poor child, and his anxiety to promote her future welfare, by such a proposal as I have now communicated to you."

"Don't ask me to say yes to it, sir!" pleaded Mrs. Peckover with the tears in her eyes. "Don't ask me to do that! Anything else to

prove my gratitude for your kindness to us ; but how can I part from my own little Mary ? You can't have the heart to ask that of me ! ”

“ I have the heart, Mrs. Peckover, to feel deeply for your distress at the idea of parting from the child ; but, for her sake, I must again ask you to control your feelings. And, more than that, I must appeal to you by your love to her, to grant a fair hearing to the petition which I now make on Mr. Blyth's behalf.”

“ I would indeed, if I could, sir,—but it's just because I love her so that I can't ! Besides, as you yourself said, he's a perfect stranger.”

“ I readily admit the force of that objection on your part, Mrs. Peckover ; but let me remind you, that I vouch for the uprightness of his character, and his fitness to be trusted with the child, after twenty years experience of him. You may answer to that, that I am a stranger too ; and I can only ask you, in return, frankly to accept my character and position as the best proofs I can offer you that I am not unworthy of your confidence. If you placed little Mary for instruction (as you well might) in an asylum for the deaf and dumb, you

would be obliged to put implicit trust in the authorities of that asylum, on much the same grounds as those I now advance to justify you in putting trust in me."

"Oh, sir! don't think—pray don't think I am unwilling to trust you—so kind and good as you have been to us to-day—and a clergyman too—I should be ashamed of myself, and my ingratitude, if I could doubt——"

"Let me tell you, plainly and candidly, what advantages for the child Mr. Blyth's proposal holds out. He has no family of his own, and his wife, poor lady, is, as he has hinted to you, an invalid for life. If you could only see the gentleness and sweet patience with which she bears her affliction, you would acknowledge that little Mary could appeal for an affectionate welcome to no kinder heart than Mrs. Blyth's. I assure you most seriously, that the only danger I should fear for the child in my friend's house, would be that she would be spoilt by excessive indulgence. Though by no means a rich man, Mr. Blyth is in an independent position, and can offer her all the comforts of life. In one word

the home to which he is ready to take her, is a home of love and happiness and security, in the best and purest meaning of those words."

"Don't say any more, sir! Don't break my heart by making me part with her!"

"You will live, Mrs. Peckover, to thank me for trying your fortitude as I try it now. Hear me a little longer, while I tell you what terms Mr. Blyth proposes. He is not only willing but anxious—if you give the child into his charge—that you should have access to her whenever you like. He will leave his address in London with you. He desires, from motives alike honourable to you and to himself, to defray your travelling expenses whenever you wish to see the child. He will always acknowledge your prior right to her affection and her duty. He will offer her every facility in his power for constantly corresponding with you; and if the life she leads in his house be, even in the slightest respect, distasteful to her, he pledges himself to give her up to you again—if you and she desire it—at any sacrifice of his own wishes and his own feelings. These are the terms he proposes, Mrs. Peckover,

and I can most solemnly assure you, on my honour as a clergyman and a gentleman, that he will hold sacred the strict performance of all and each of these conditions, exactly as I have stated them."

"I ought to let her go, sir—I know I ought to show how grateful I am for Mr. Blyth's generosity by letting her go—but how can I, after all the long time she's been like my own child to me? Oh, ma'am, say a word for me!—I seem so selfish for not giving her up—say a word for me!"

"Will you let me say a word for little Mary instead?" rejoined Mrs. Joyce. "Will you let me remind you that Mr. Blyth's proposal offers her a secure protection against that inhuman wretch of a man who has ill-used her already, and may often ill-use her again, in spite of everything you can do to prevent him. Pray think of that, Mrs. Peckover—pray do!"

Poor Mrs. Peckover showed that she thought of it bitterly enough, by a fresh burst of tears.

The rector poured out a glass of water, and gave it to her. "Do not think us inconsiderate or unfeeling," he said, "in pressing Mr. Blyth's

offer on you so perseveringly as we do. We sincerely think it our duty to act thus on Mary's account, for the sake of her future interests. Only reflect on her position, if she remains in the circus as she grows up! Would all your watchful and admirable kindness be sufficient to shield her then against dangers to which I hardly dare allude?—against wickedness which would take advantage of her defencelessness, her innocence, and even her misfortune? Consider all that Mr. Blyth's proposal promises for her future life; for the sacred preservation of her purity of heart and mind. Look forward to the day when little Mary will have grown up to be a young woman; and I will answer, Mrs. Peckover, for your doing full justice to the importance of my friend's offer."

"I know it's all true, sir: I know I'm an ungrateful selfish wretch—but only give me a little time to think; a little time longer to be with the poor darling that I love like my own child!"

Doctor Joyce was just drawing his chair closer to Mrs. Peckover before he answered, when the

door opened and the respectable Vance softly entered the room.

"What do you want here?" said the rector, a little irritably. "Didn't I tell you not to come in again till I rang for you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," answered Vance, casting rather a malicious look at the clown's wife as he closed the door behind him—"but there's a person waiting in the hall, who says he comes on important business, and must see you directly."

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"He says his name is Jubber, if you please, sir."

Mrs. Peckover started from her chair with a scream. "Don't—pray, for mercy's sake, sir, don't let him into the garden where Mary is!" she gasped, clutching Doctor Joyce by the arm in the extremity of her terror. "He's found us out, and come here in one of his dreadful passions—I know it! He cares for nothing and for nobody, sir: he's bad enough to ill-treat her even before *you*. Oh! what am I to do? oh, good gracious heavens! what am I to do?"

"Leave everything to me, and sit down again," said the rector kindly. Then, turning to Vance, he added:—"show Mr. Jubber into the cloak-room, and say I will be with him directly."

"Now Mrs. Peckover," continued Doctor Joyce in the most perfectly composed manner, "before I see this man (whose business I can guess at) I have three important questions to ask of you, In the first place, were you not a witness last night, of his cruel ill-usage of that poor child? (Mr. Blyth told me of it). The fellow actually beat her, did he not?"

"Oh, indeed he did, sir!—beat her most cruelly with a cane."

"And you saw it all yourself?"

"I did, sir. He'd have used her worse, if I hadn't been by to prevent him."

"Very well. Now tell me if you or your husband have signed any agreement—any papers, I mean, giving this man a right to claim the child as one of his performers?"

"*Me* sign an agreement, sir! I never did such a thing in all my life. Jubber would think himself insulted, if you only talked of his signing an

agreement about a child, with such as me or Jemmy."

"Better and better. Now, my third question refers to little Mary herself. I will undertake to put it out of this blackguard's power ever to lay a finger on her again—but I can only do so on one condition, which it rests entirely with you to grant."

"I'll do anything to save her, sir, I will indeed."

"The condition is that you consent to Mr. Blyth's proposal; for I can only ensure the child's safety thoroughly on those terms."

"Then, sir, I consent to it," said Mrs. Peckover, speaking with a sudden firmness of tone and manner which almost startled Mrs. Joyce, who stood by listening anxiously. "I consent to it; for I should be the vilest wretch in the world, if I could say 'no' at such a time as this. I will trust my precious darling treasure to you, sir, and to Mr. Blyth from this moment. God bless *her*, and comfort *me*! for I want comfort badly enough. Oh, Mary! Mary! my own little Mary! to think of you and me ever being parted like this!" The poor woman turned towards the garden as she

pronounced these words; all her fortitude forsook her in an instant; and she sank back in her chair, sobbing bitterly.

"Take her out into the shrubbery where the children are, as soon as she recovers a little," whispered the rector to his wife, as he opened the dining-room door.

Though Mr. Jubber presented, to all appearance, the most scoundrelly aspect that humanity can assume, when he was clothed in his evening uniform, and illuminated by his own circus lamp-light, he nevertheless reached an infinitely loftier climax of blackguard perfection, when he was arrayed in his private costume, and was submitted to the tremendous ordeal of pure daylight. The most monstrous ape that could be picked from the cages of the Zoological Gardens would have gained by comparison with him as he now appeared, standing in the Rectory cloak-room, with his debauched bloodshot eyes staring grimly contemptuous all about him, with his yellow flabby throat exposed by a turn-down collar and a light blue neck-tie, with the rouge still smeared over his gross unhealthy cheeks, with his mangy shirt-

front bespattered with bad embroidery, and false jewelry that had not even the politic decency to keep itself clean. He had his hat on, and was sulkily running his dirty fingers through the greasy black ringlets that flowed over his coat-collar, when Doctor Joyce entered the cloak-room.

"You wished to speak with me?" said the rector, not sitting down himself, and not asking Mr. Jubber to sit down.

"Oh! you're Doctor Joyce?" said the fellow, assuming his most insolent familiarity of manner directly.

"That is my name," said Dr. Joyce very quietly.

"Will you have the goodness to state your business with me immediately, and in the fewest possible words?"

"Hullo! You take that tone with me, do you?" said Jubber, setting his arms akimbo, and tapping his foot fiercely on the floor, "you're trying to come Tommy Grand over me already, are you?—very good! I'm the man to give you change in you're own coin—so here goes! What do you mean by enticing away my Mysterious Foundling?"

What do you mean by this private swindle of talent that belongs to my circus?"

"You had better proceed a little," said the rector, more quietly than before. "Thus far, I understand nothing whatever, except that you wish to behave offensively to me; which, in a person of your appearance, is I assure you of not the slightest consequence. You had much better save time by stating what you have to say in plain words."

"You want plain words—eh?" cried Jubber, losing his temper. "Then, by God you shall have them, and plain enough!"

"Stop a minute," said Doctor Joyce. "If you use oaths in my presence again, I shall ring for my servant, and order him to show you out of the house."

"You will?"

"I will most certainly."

There was a moment's pause; and the black-guard and the gentleman looked one another straight in the face. It was the old, invariable struggle, between the quite firmness of good breeding, and the savage obstinacy of bad; and

it ended in the old, invariable way. The black-guard flinched first.

“If your servant lays a finger on me, I’ll thrash him within an inch of his life,” said Jubber, looking towards the door, and scowling as he looked. “But that’s not the point, just now—the point is, that I charge you with getting my deaf and dumb girl into your house, to perform before you, of course on the sly. If you’re too virtuous to come to my circus—and better than you have been there—you ought to have sent to me, and paid the proper price for a private performance. What do you mean by treating a public servant, like me, with your infernal aristocratic looks, as if I was dirt under your feet, after such shabby doings as you’ve been guilty of—eh?”

“May I ask how you know that the child you refer to has been at my house to-day?” asked Doctor Joyce, without taking the slightest notice of Mr. Jubber’s indignation.

“One of my people saw that swindling hypocrite of a Peckover taking her in; and told me of it when I missed them at dinner. There! that’s good evidence I rather think! Deny it if you can.”

"I have not the slightest intention of denying it. The child is now in my house."

"And has gone through all her performances, of course? Ah! shabby! shabby! I should be ashamed of myself if *I'd* tried to do a man out of his rights like that."

"I am most unaffectedly rejoiced to hear that you are capable, under any circumstances, of being ashamed of yourself at all," rejoined the rector. "The child, however, has gone through no performances here, not having been sent for with any such purpose as you suppose. But, as you said just now, that's not the point. Pray, why did you speak of the little girl, a moment ago, as *your* child?"

"Because she's one of my performers, of course. But, come! I've had enough of this; I can't stop talking here all day; I want the child—so just deliver her up at once, will you?—and turn out Peck as soon as you like after. I'll cure them both of ever doing this sort of thing again! I'll make them stick tight to the circus for the future! I'll show them——"

"You would be employing your time much

more usefully, if you occupied it in altering the bills of your performance, so as to inform the public that the deaf and dumb child will not appear before them again."

"Not appear again?—not appear to-night in my circus? Why, hang me, if I don't think you're trying to be funny all of a sudden! Alter my bills—eh? Not bad! Upon my soul, not at all bad for a parson! Give us another joke, sir; I'm all attention." And Mr. Jubber put his hand to his ear, grinning in a perfect fury of sarcasm.

"I am quite in earnest," said the rector. "A friend of mine has adopted the child, and will take her home with him to-morrow morning. Mrs. Peckover (the only person who has any right to exercise control over her) has consented to this arrangement. If your business here was to take the child back to your circus, it is right to inform you that she will not leave my house, till she goes to London to-morrow with my friend."

"And you think I'm the sort of man to stand this?—and give up the child?—and alter the

bills?—and lose money?—and be as mild as mother's milk all the time? Oh, yes, of course! I'm so devilish fond of you and your friend! You're such nice men, you can make me do anything! D—n and b—t all this jabber and nonsense," roared the ruffian, passing suddenly from insolence to fury, and striking his fist on the table. "Give me the child at once, do you hear? Give her up, I say—I won't leave the house till I've got her!"

Just as Mr. Jubber swore for the second time, Doctor Joyce rang the bell. "I told you what I should do, if you used oaths in my presence again," said the rector.

"And *I* told *you* I'd kill the servant if he laid a finger on me," said Jubber, knocking his hat firmly on his head, and tucking up his cuffs.

Vance appeared at the door, much less pompous than usual, and displaying an interesting paleness of complexion. Jubber spat slightly into the palm of each of his hands, and clenched his fists.

"Have you done dinner down stairs?" asked Doctor Joyce, reddening a little, but still very quiet.

"Yes, sir," answered Vance, in a remarkably conciliating voice.

"Tell James to go to the constable, and say I want him; and let the gardener wait with you outside there in the hall."

"Now," said the rector, shutting the door again after issuing these orders, and placing himself once more face to face with Mr. Jubber. "Now I have a last word or two of warning to give you, which I recommend you to listen to quietly. In the first place, you have no right over the child whatever; for I happen to know that you are without a signed agreement promising you her services. (You had better hear me out for your own sake.) You have no legal right, I say, to control the child in any manner; she is a perfectly free agent, so far as you are concerned—yes! yes! you deny it of course! I have only to say, that if you attempt to back that denial by still asserting your claim to her, and making a disturbance in my house, as sure as you stand there, I'll ruin you in Rubbleford and in all the country round. (It's no use laughing—I can do it!) You beat the child in the vilest

manner last night. I am a magistrate; and I have my prosecutor, and my witness of the assault ready whenever I choose to call them. I can fine or imprison you, which I please. You know the public; you know what they think of people who ill-use helpless children. If you appeared in that character before me, the Rubbleford paper would report it; and, so far as the interests of your circus are concerned, you would be a ruined man in this part of the country—you would, you know it! Now, I will spare you this—not from any tenderness towards you—on condition that you take yourself off quietly, and never let us hear from you again. I strongly advise you to go at once; for if you wait till the constable comes, I will not answer for it that my sense of duty may not force me into giving you into custody.” With which words, Doctor Joyce threw open the door, and pointed to the hall.

Throughout the delivery of this speech, violent indignation, ungovernable surprise, abject terror, and impotent rage, ravaged by turns the breast of Mr. Jubber. He stamped about the room, and uttered fragments of oaths; but did not otherwise

interrupt Doctor Joyce, while that gentleman was speaking to him. When the rector had done, the fellow had his insolent answer ready directly. To do him justice, he was consistent, if he was nothing else—he was bully and blackguard to the very last.

“Magistrate or parson,” he cried, snapping his fingers, “I don’t care a d—n for you in either capacity! You keep the child here at your peril! I’ll go to the first lawyer in Rubbleford, and bring an action against you. I’ll show you a little legal law! *You* ruin me indeed! I can prove that I only thrashed the little toad, the nasty deaf idiot, because she deserved it. I’ll be even with you! I’ll have the child back wherever you take her to. I’ll show you a little legal law!” (Here he stepped to the hall door). “I’ll be even with you, damme! I’ll charge you with setting on your menial servants to assault me.” (Here he looked fiercely at the gardener, a freckled Scotch giant of six feet three, and instantly descended five steps.) “Lay a finger on me, if you dare! I’m a free Englishman, and I’ll have my rights, and my legal law! I’ll bring

an action! I'll ruin you! I'll have her back, and beat her worse than ever when I get her! I'll ——." Here he strutted into the front garden; his words grew indistinct, and his gross voice became gradually less and less audible. The coachman at the outer gate saw the last of him, and reported that he made his exit striking viciously at the flowers with his cane, and swearing that he would ruin the rector with "legal law."

After leaving certain directions with his servants, in the very improbable event of Mr. Jubber's return, Doctor Joyce repaired immediately to his dining-room. No one was there, so he went on into the garden.

Here he found the family and the visitors all assembled together; but a great change had passed over the whole party during his absence. Mr. Blyth, on being informed of the result of the rector's conversation with Mrs. Peckover, acted with his usual impetuosity and utter want of discretion; writing down delightedly on little Mary's slate, without the slightest previous preparation or coaxing, that she was to go home

with him to-morrow, and be as happy as the day was long, all the rest of her life. The result of this incautious method of proceeding was that the child became excessively frightened, and ran away from everybody to take refuge with Mrs. Peckover. She was still crying, and holding tight by the good woman's gown with both hands ; and Valentine was still loudly declaring to everybody that he loved her all the better for showing such faithful affection to her earliest and best friend, when the rector joined the party under the coolly-murmuring trees.

Doctor Joyce spoke but briefly of his interview with Mr. Jubber, concealing much that had passed at it, and making very light of the threats which the fellow had uttered on his departure. Mrs. Peckover, whose self-possession seemed in imminent danger of being overthrown by little Mary's mute demonstrations of affection, listened anxiously to every word the Doctor uttered ; and, as soon as he had done, said that she must go back to the circus directly, to tell her husband the truth about all that had occurred, as a necessary set-off against the slanders that

were sure to be spoken against her by Mr. Jubber.

"Oh, never mind *me*, ma'am!" she said, in answer to the apprehensions expressed by Mrs. Joyce about her reception when she got back to the circus. "The dear child's safe; and that's all I care about. I'm big enough and strong enough to take my own part; and Jemmy he's always by to help me when I can't. May I come back, if you please, sir, this evening; and say—and say?——"

She would have added, "and say good-bye;" but the thoughts which now gathered round that one word, made it too hard to utter. She silently curtseyed her thanks for the warm invitation that was given her to return; stooped down to the child; and, kissing her, wrote on the slate "I shall be back, dear, in the evening, at seven o'clock"—then disengaged the little hands that still held so fast by her gown, and hurried from the garden, without once venturing to look behind her as she crossed the sunny lawn.

Mrs. Joyce, and the young ladies, and the

rector, all tried their best to console little Mary; and all failed. She resolutely, though very gently, resisted them; walking away into corners by herself, and looking constantly at her slate, as if she could only find comfort in reading the few words which Mrs. Peckover had written on it. At last, Mr. Blyth took her up on his knee. She struggled to get away, for a moment—then looked intently in his face; and, sighing very mournfully, laid her head down on his shoulder. There was a world of promise for the future success of Valentine's affectionate project in that simple action, and in the preference which it showed.

The day wore on quietly—evening came—seven o'clock struck—then half-past—then eight—and Mrs. Peckover never appeared. Doctor Joyce grew uneasy, and sent Vance to the circus to get some news of her.

It was again Mr. Blyth—and Mr. Blyth only—who succeeded in partially quieting little Mary under the heavy disappointment of not seeing Mrs. Peckover at the appointed time. The child had been restless at first, and had wanted to go

to the circus. Finding that they tenderly, but firmly, detained her at the Rectory, she wept bitterly—wept so long, that at last she fairly cried herself asleep in Valentine's arms. He sat anxiously supporting her with a patience that nothing could tire. The sunset rays, which he had at first carefully kept from falling on her face, vanished from the horizon; the quiet lustre of twilight overspread the sky—and still he refused to let her be taken from him; and said he would sit as he was all through the night rather than let her be disturbed.

Vance came back, and brought word that Mrs. Peckover would follow him in half an hour. They had given her some work to do at the circus, which she was obliged to finish before she could return to the Rectory.

Having delivered this message, Vance next produced a hand-bill, which he said was being widely circulated all over Rubbleford; and which proved to be the composition of Mr. Jubber himself. That ingenious ruffian, having doubtless discovered that "legal law" was powerless to help him to his revenge, and that it would be

his wisest proceeding to keep clear of Doctor Joyce in the rector's magisterial capacity, was now artfully attempting to turn the loss of the child to his own profit, by dint of prompt and audacious lying in his favourite large type, sprinkled with red letters. He informed the public, through the medium of his hand-bills, that the father of the Mysterious Foundling had been "most providentially" discovered, and that he (Mr. Jubber) had given the child up immediately, without a thought of what he might personally suffer, in pocket as well as in mind, by the loss of one of the most "devotedly-cherished" and attractive of his performers. After this, he appealed confidently to the sympathy of people of every degree, and "fond parents" especially, to compensate and console him by flocking in crowds to the circus; adding, that if additional stimulus were wanted to urge the public into "rallying round the Ring," he was prepared to administer it forthwith, in the shape of the smallest dwarf in the world, for whose services he was then in treaty, and whose first appearance before a Rubbleford audience

would take place, he hoped, in the course of a few days.

Such was Mr. Jubber's ingenious contrivance for turning to good pecuniary account the ignominious defeat which he had suffered at the hands of Doctor Joyce.

After much patient reasoning and many earnest expostulations, Mrs. Joyce at last succeeded in persuading Mr. Blyth that he might carry little Mary upstairs to her bed, without any danger of awakening her. The moonbeams were streaming through the windows over the broad, old-fashioned landings of the rectory stair-case, and bathed the child's sleeping face in their lovely light, as Valentine carefully bore her in his own arms to her bedroom. "Oh!" he whispered to himself, as he paused for an instant where the moon shone in clearest on the landing; and looked down on her—"Oh! if my poor Lavinia could only see little Mary now!"

They laid her, still asleep, on the bed; and covered her over lightly with a shawl—then went down stairs again to wait for Mrs. Peckover.

The clown's wife came in half an hour, as she had promised. They saw much sorrow and weariness in her face, as they looked at her. Besides the bundle with the child's few clothes in it, which she carried with her, she brought the hair bracelet and the pocket-handkerchief which had been found on little Mary's mother.

"Wherever the child goes," she said, "these two things must go with her." She addressed Mr. Blyth as she spoke, and gave the hair bracelet and the handkerchief into his own hands.

It seemed rather a relief than a disappointment to Mrs. Peckover to hear that the child was asleep above stairs. All pain of parting would now be spared, on one side at least. She went up to look at her on her bed; and kissed her, but so lightly that little Mary's sleep was undisturbed by that farewell token of tenderness and love.

"Tell her to write to me, sir," said poor Mrs. Peckover, holding Valentine's hand fast, and looking wistfully in his face through her gathering tears. "I shall prize my first letter from her so much, if it's only a couple of lines. God bless

you, sir; and good-bye! It ought to be a comfort to me, and it is, to know that you will be kind to her; I hope I shall get up to London some day, and see her myself. But don't forget the letter, sir, for I shan't fret so much after her, when once I've got that!"

She went away, sadly murmuring these last words many times over, while Valentine was trying to cheer and reassure her, as they walked together to the outer gate. Doctor Joyce accompanied them down the front-garden path; and exacted from her a promise to return often to the Rectory, while the circus was at Rubbleford; saying also that he and his family desired her to look on them always as her fast and firm friends in any emergency. Valentine entreated her, over and over again, to remember the terms of their agreement, and to come and judge for herself of the child's happiness in her new home. She only answered "Don't forget the letter, sir!" And so they parted.

Early the next morning, Mr. Blyth and little Mary left the Rectory, and started for London by the first coach.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESULT.

THE result of Mr. Blyth's Adventure in the travelling Circus, and of the Story told by the clown's wife which followed it, was that little Mary at once became a member of the painter's family, and grew up happily, in her new home, into the beautiful young lady who was called "Madonna" by Valenfine, by his wife, and by all intimate friends who were in the habit of frequenting the house.

Mr. Blyth's first proceeding, after he had brought the little girl home with him, was to take her to the most eminent aural surgeon of the day. He did this, not in the hope of any curative result following the medical examination, but as a first duty which he thought he owed to her, now that she was under his sole charge.

The surgeon was deeply interested in the case; but, after giving it the most careful attention, he declared that it was hopeless. Her sense of hearing, he said, was entirely gone; but her faculty of speech, although it had been totally disused (as Mrs. Peckover had stated) for more than two years past, might, he thought, be imperfectly regained, at some future time, if a tedious, painful, and uncertain process of education were resorted to, under the direction of an experienced teacher of the deaf and dumb. The child, however, had such a horror of this resource being tried, when it was communicated to her, that Mr. Blyth instinctively followed Mrs. Peckover's example, and consulted the little creature's feelings, by allowing her in this particular—and indeed in most others—to remain perfectly happy and contented in her own way.

The first influence which reconciled her almost immediately to her new home, was the influence of Mrs. Blyth. The perfect gentleness and patience with which the painter's wife bore her incurable malady, seemed to impress the child in a very remarkable manner from the first. The sight of

that frail, wasted life, which they told her, by writing, had been shut up so long in the same beautiful room, and had been condemned to the same weary inaction for so many, many years past—the look of that pale, tranquil face, which had gained back in beauty of expression so much of what it had lost in beauty of form—struck at once to Mary's heart, and filled her with one of those new and mysterious sensations which mark epochs in the growth of a child's moral nature. Nor did these first impressions ever alter. When years had passed away, and when Mary, being "little" Mary no longer, possessed those marked characteristics of feature and expression which gained for her the name of "Madonna," she still preserved all her child's feelings for the painter's wife. However light and playful her manner might often be with Valentine, it invariably changed when she was in Mrs. Blyth's presence; always displaying, at such times, the same anxious tenderness, the same artless admiration, and the same watchful and loving sympathy. There was something secret and superstitious in the girl's fondness for Mrs. Blyth. She appeared

unwilling to let others know what this affection really was in all its depth and fulness : it seemed to be intuitively preserved by her in the most sacred privacy of her own heart, as if the feeling had been part of her religion, or rather as if it had been a religion in itself.

The custom she followed in reading her prayers was alone enough to show that the essential nature of her first childish love for the painter's wife remained unchanged in later years. When she entered her new home, they gave her a little book, with a prayer for the morning and a prayer for the evening in it, which she was instructed to read over to herself, kneeling at Mrs. Blyth's bedside. As she grew older, and began to mature into womanhood, it was thought that she might prefer to be alone in her own room, while engaged in her mute and simple act of devotion. But, the very first night she was sent there, she came back weeping : and confessed, by her own language of signs and writing, that she dare not lie down to sleep, because when she read her prayers alone she could not feel the same faith in God's accepting them, which she always felt when she read

them in Mrs. Blyth's presence. They tried to reason with her gently, but it was useless. Nothing quieted and consoled her, but permission to resume her old privilege: and from that time forth, she still read her prayers, morning and evening, as she had read them when a child, by Mrs. Blyth's bedside.

The girl's affection for her new mother, which testified itself thus strongly and sincerely in many other ways, was returned by that mother with equal fervour. From the day when little Mary first appeared at her bedside, Mrs. Blyth felt, to use her own expression, as if a new strength had been given her to enjoy the new happiness that was added to her life. Brighter hopes, better health, calmer resignation, and purer peace seemed to follow the child's footsteps and be always inherent in her very presence, as she moved to and fro in the sick room. All the little difficulties of communicating with her and teaching her, which her misfortune rendered inevitable, and which might sometimes have been felt as tedious by others, were so many distinct sources of happiness, so many exquisite occupations of once-weary

time to Mrs. Blyth. Even those who had witnessed the poor lady's admirable patience and cheerfulness, from the first, in bearing with her hard lot, were now often astonished to find her, under the influence of little Mary's presence, even rivalling her husband's flow of good spirits, in her own gentle feminine way. All the friends of the family declared that the child had succeeded where doctors, and medicines, and luxuries; and the sufferer's own courageous resignation had hitherto failed—for she had succeeded in endowing Mrs. Blyth with a new life. And they were right. A fresh object for the affections of the heart and the thoughts of the mind, is a fresh life for every feeling and thinking human being, in sickness even as well as in health.

In this sense, indeed, the child brought fresh life with her to all who lived in her new home—to the servants, as well as to the master and mistress. The cloud had rarely found its way into that happy dwelling in former days: now the sunshine seemed fixed there for ever. No more beautiful and touching proof of what the gentle heroism of patient dispositions and loving hearts can do

towards guiding human existence, unconquered and unsullied, through its hardest trials, could be found anywhere than was presented by the aspect of the painter's household. Here were two chief members of one little family circle, afflicted by such incurable bodily calamity as it falls to the lot of but few human beings to suffer—yet here were no sighs, no tears, no vain repinings with each new morning, no gloomy thoughts to set woe and terror watching by the pillow at night. In this home of love, life, even in its frailest aspects, was still greater than its greatest trials; though only strong to conquer by virtue of its own innocence and purity, its simple unworldly aspirations, its heroic self-sacrificing devotion to the happiness and the anxieties of others.

As the course of her education proceeded, many striking peculiarities became developed in Madonna's disposition, which seemed to be all more or less produced by the necessary influence of her affliction on the formation of her character. The social isolation to which that affliction condemned her, the solitude of thought and feeling into which it forced her, tended from an early

period to make her mind remarkably self-reliant, for so young a girl. Though she paid the readiest deference to the opinions of others, she always seemed to have convictions of her own in reserve—judging for herself on all occasions as it generally seemed to those about her, more by instinct than by reason. This peculiarity in her character was often curiously exemplified by her behaviour to the different visitors who came to Mr. Blyth's house.

Her first impression of strangers seemed invariably to decide her opinion of them at once and for ever. She liked or disliked people heartily; estimating them apparently from considerations entirely irrespective of age, or sex, or personal appearance. Sometimes, the very person who was thought certain to attract her, proved to be absolutely repulsive to her—sometimes people who, in Mr. Blyth's opinion, were sure to be unwelcome visitors to Madonna, turned out, incomprehensibly, to be people whom she took a violent liking to directly. She always betrayed her pleasure or uneasiness in the society of others with the most diverting candour—showing the

extremest anxiety to conciliate and attract those whom she liked ; running away and hiding herself like a child, from those whom she disliked. There were some unhappy people, in this latter class, whom no persuasion could ever induce her to see a second time, if she could possibly avoid it.

She could never give any satisfactory account of how she proceeded in forming her opinions of others. The only visible means of arriving at them, which her deafness and dumbness permitted her to use, consisted simply in examination of a stranger's manner, expression, and play of features at a first interview. This process, however, seemed always amply sufficient for her ; and in more than one instance events proved that her judgment had not been misled by it. Her affliction had tended, indeed, to sharpen her faculties of observation and her powers of analysis to such a remarkable degree, that she often guessed the general tenor of a conversation quite correctly, merely by watching the minute varieties of expression and gesture in the persons speaking—fixing her attention always with especial

intentness on the changeful and rapid motions of their lips.

Exiled alike from the worlds of sound and speech, the poor girl's enjoyment of all that she could still gain of happiness, by means of the seeing sense that was left her, was inconceivable in its intensity to her speaking and hearing fellow-creatures. All beautiful sights, and particularly the exquisite combinations that Nature presents, filled her with an artless rapture, which it affected the most unimpressible people to witness. Trees were beyond all other objects the greatest luxuries that her eyes could enjoy. She would sit for hours, on fresh summer evenings, watching the mere waving of the leaves; her face flushed, her whole nervous organisation trembling with the sensations of deep and perfect happiness which that simple sight imparted to her. All the riches and honours which this world can afford, would not have added to her existence a tithe of that pleasure which Valentine easily conferred on her, by teaching her to draw; he might almost be said to have given her a new sense in exchange for the senses that she had lost. She often used

to dance about the room with the reckless ecstasy of a child, in her ungovernable delight at the prospect of a sketching expedition with Mr. Blyth in the Hampstead fields.

At a very early date of her sojourn with Valentine, it was discovered that her total deafness did not entirely exclude her from every effect of sound. She was acutely sensitive to the influence of percussion—that is to say (if so vague and contradictory an expression may be allowed), she could, under certain conditions, *feel* the sounds that she could not hear. For example, if Mr. Blyth wished to bring her to his side when they were together in the painting-room, and when she happened neither to be looking at him nor to be within reach of a touch, he used to rub his foot, or the end of his mahl-stick gently against the floor. The slight concussion so produced, reached her nerves instantly; provided always that some part of her body touched the floor on which such experiments were tried.

As a means of extending her facilities of social communication, she was instructed in the deaf and dumb alphabet by Valentine's direction; he

and his wife, of course, learning it also; and many of their intimate friends, who were often in the house, following their example for Madonna's sake. Oddly enough, however, she frequently preferred to express herself, or to be addressed by others, according to the clumsier and slower system of signs and writing, to which she had been accustomed from childhood. She carefully preserved her little slate with its ornamented frame, and kept it hanging at her side, just as she wore it on the morning of her visit to the Rectory-house at Rubbleford.

In one exceptional case, and one only, did her misfortune appear to have the power of affecting her tranquillity seriously. Whenever, by any accident, she happened to be left in the dark, she was overcome by the most violent terror. It was found, even when others were with her, that she never could keep her self-possession at such times. Her own explanation of her feelings on these occasions, at once suggested the simplest and best of reasons to account for this weakness in her character. "Remember," she wrote on her slate, when a new servant was curious to

know why she always slept with a light in her room—"Remember that I am deaf and blind too in the darkness. You, who can hear, have a sense to serve you, instead of sight, in the dark—your ears are of use to you then, as your eyes are in the light. Not hearing anything, I seem to lose all my senses together, when I can't see anything; and this is why I can't help feeling lost, and helpless, and frightened out of my wits when I'm in the darkness."

It was only by rare accidents, which there was no providing against, that she was ever terrified in this way, after her horror of being in the dark had been first discovered. In this, as in all other matters, Valentine made her happiness his own peculiar care. He was, in truth, unnecessarily sensitive about her in many things; and often suffered anxieties on her account, which he was afraid or ashamed to confess to anybody, sometimes even including his wife.

The first and the chief of these anxieties, however, he was obliged to communicate to others, for the sake of securing his own peace of mind. He had a morbid dread that Madonna might be

one day traced and discovered by her father, or by some of her surviving relatives. His heart sickened at the bare thought of the desolation that would fall upon his household, if the adopted child who was now the one great object in life to his wife and himself, should ever, by any evil chance, be claimed and taken away from them. To avert by every means in his power any possibility of the occurrence of such a calamity as this, he determined to keep all the particulars he knew about Madonna's birth, as well as the circumstances under which he himself first met with her, a profound secret from everybody—from intimate friends, and from mere acquaintances alike.

Animated by this resolution, he wrote off to Doctor Joyce and Mrs. Peckover a day or two after the child's first entry under his roof, stating his motives for observing the strictest precaution in relation to her, and pledging both the persons whom he addressed to the deepest secrecy accordingly. As for the hair bracelet, if his conscience had allowed him, he would have destroyed it immediately; but feeling that this would be an

inexcusable breach of trust, he was fain to be content with locking it up, as well as the pocket-handkerchief, in one of the most private recesses of an old bureau in his painting-room, the key of which he always kept attached to his own watch chain.

Not one of his London friends ever knew how he first met with Madonna. He baffled all forms of inquiry with one form of answer. The circumstances (he used to say) were very melancholy, and such as he must be excused from relating—except indeed as to her deafness, which he had no objection to state was the result of a severe fall. He would take it as a favour if people would be pleased to consider her history before she came into his house as a perfect blank. But now that she was a member of his family, all friends were welcome to cultivate her acquaintance in her proper character, as his adopted daughter—as “Miss Blyth,” if it would be any particular gratification to others to call her so. This method of silencing troublesome curiosity succeeded certainly to admiration; but at the expense of Mr. Blyth’s own moral character.

Kind friends, with the exception of some few who were really acquainted with his real disposition and his early life, all shook their heads, and laughed in secret; saying that the mystery was plain enough to the most ordinary capacity, for the young lady could be neither more nor less than a natural child of his own.

Mrs. Blyth was much more indignant at this report than her husband, when in due time it reached the painter's house. Valentine was not the man to care a straw about calumny, so long as it was only confined to his own character. He would have been now perfectly easy about the preservation of his secret, but for a little distrust, which he felt at times in spite of himself, on the subject of Mrs. Peckover's discretion. He was not so easily convinced, as he ought to have been, of that excellent woman's power of governing her tongue on all occasions; and what was worse, he could not keep his doubts on this important point to himself, even in her presence.

It was the most amusing thing in the world to hear Mr. Blyth solemnly warning Mrs. Peckover to be careful in keeping the important

secret, every time she came to London to see Madonna. Whether she only paid them a visit for the day, and then went away again—or whether she spent her Christmas with them, on those occasions when her husband got a Pantomime engagement at one of the minor theatres—Valentine's greeting always ended nervously with this distrustful question:—“Excuse me for asking, Mrs. Peckover, but are you quite sure you have kept what you know about little Mary and her mother, and dates and places and all that, properly hidden from prying people, since you were here last?” At which point Mrs. Peckover generally answered by repeating, always with the same sarcastic emphasis:—“Properly hidden, did you say, sir? Of course I keep what I know properly hidden, for of course I can hold my tongue. In my time, sir, it used always to take two parties to play at a game of Hide and Seek. Who in the world is seeking after little Mary, I should like to know?”

Perhaps Mrs. Peckover's view of the case was the right one, and there was really no

need to fear that any paternal claimant was in search of Madonna — or, perhaps, the extraordinary discretion observed by the persons who were in the secret of her history, prevented any particulars connected with the girl's origin from reaching her father or friends, presuming them to be still alive and anxiously looking for her. But, at any rate, let it happen from what cause it might, this much at least is certain, that nobody was ever heard of as wanting to assert a claim to Valentine's adopted child, from the time when he took her home with him as his daughter, to the time when the reader first made his acquaintance, many pages back, in the congenial sphere of his own new painting-room.*

* See note at the end of this volume.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISITOR IN THE STUDIO.

It is now a long time ago since we left Mr. Blyth and Madonna in the studio. The first was engaged, it may be remembered, in the arduous process of smartening up Bacchanalian Nymphs in the foreground of a grand Classical landscape. The second was modestly occupied in making a copy of the head of the Venus de' Medici.

The two sit nearly at opposite ends of the studio, working away steadily — Valentine, in particular, paying such breathless attention to his task, that he cannot even whistle "Drops of Brandy" as usual; and has only left his place once that morning to see how Madonna is getting on. It is past one o'clock already, when a tremendous ring is heard at the house-bell.

"There he is!" cries Mr. Blyth to himself,

pausing in the very act of putting a high light on a nymph's thigh :—" There's Zack !—got away from the tea merchant's, and come here according to promise. I know his ring among a thousand ; it's worse even than the postman's ; it's like an alarm of fire ! "

Here Valentine drums gently with his mahlstick on the floor. Madonna looks towards him directly ; he waves his hand round and round rapidly above his head. This is the sign which means " Zack." The girl smiles brightly, and blushes as she sees it. Zack is evidently one of her special favourites.

While the young gentleman is being admitted at the garden-gate, there is a leisure moment to explain how he became acquainted with Mr. Blyth.

Valentine's father, and Mrs. Thorpe's father (the identical Mr. Goodworth who figures at the beginning of this narrative as one of the actors in the Sunday Drama at Baregrove Square), were intimate friends of that drowsy-story-telling and copious-Port-drinking old school, the last relics of which are now fast disappearing from

among us. The friendly intercourse between these gentlemen spread, naturally enough, to the sons and daughters who formed their respective families. From the time of Mr. Thorpe's marriage to Miss Goodworth, however, the connection between the junior Goodworths and Blyths began to grow less intimate—so far, at least, as the new bride and Valentine were concerned. The rigid modern Puritan of Baregrove Square, and the eccentric votary of the Fine Arts, mutually disapproved of each other from the very first. Visits of ceremony were exchanged at long intervals; but even these were discontinued on Madonna's arrival under Valentine's roof: for Mr. Thorpe was one of the first of the charitable friends of the family, who suspected her to be the painter's natural child, and said he thought it his duty to discourage immorality by discontinuing Mr. Blyth's acquaintance. An almost complete separation accordingly ensued for some years, until Zack grew up to boy's estate, and was taken to see Valentine, one day in holiday time, by his grandfather. He and the painter became friends directly. Mr. Blyth liked boys, and boys of all

degrees liked him. He good-naturedly made overtures of civility to Zack's parents about this time, which were, however, accepted so coldly, that they were never renewed; the boy, nevertheless frequented Valentine's house at every opportunity, and never neglected his artist-friend in after years. At the date of this story, one of the many points in his son's conduct, of which Mr. Thorpe disapproved on high moral grounds, was the firm determination the lad showed to keep up his intimacy with Mr. Valentine Blyth.

Let us now get back to the ring at the bell.

Zack's approach to the painting-room was heralded by a scuffling of feet, a loud noise of talking, and a great deal of suspicious giggling on the part of the housemaid, who had let him in. Suddenly these sounds ceased—the door was dashed open—and Mr. Thorpe, junior, burst into the room.

"Dear old Blyth! how are you?" cried Zack. "Have you had any leap-frog since I was here last? Jump up, and let's celebrate my entry into the painting-room with a bit of manly exercise in our old way. Come on! I'll give the first

back. No shirking! Put down your palette; and one, two, three—and over!”

While pronouncing these last words, Zack ran to the end of the room opposite to Valentine; and signalised his entry into the studio by the extraordinary process of giving its owner, what is termed in the technical language of leap-frog, “a capital back.”

Mr. Blyth put down his palette, brushes, and mahl-stick—tucked up his cuffs and smiled—took a little trial skip into the air, and became serious—cried out “lower!”—took another trial skip—and, running down the room with the heavy and slightly tremulous step of a gentleman of fifty, cleared Zack in gallant style; falling over, it is true, on the other side all in a lump on his hands and feet, but giving the return “back” conscientiously, at the other end of the room; and being leapt over in an instant, with a shout of triumph, by Zack. The athletic ceremonies thus concluded, the two stood up together and shook hands heartily.

“Too stiff, Blyth—too stiff and shaky by half,” said the young gentleman. “I haven’t kept you

up enough in your gymnastics lately. We must have some more leap-frog in the garden; and I'll bring the gloves next time, and open your chest by teaching you to fight. Splendid exercise, and so good for your jolly old liver."

Delivering this opinion, Zack ran off to Madonna, who had been keeping the Venus de' Medici from being shaken down, while she looked on at the leap-frog—excessively amused, but a little nervous on Mr. Blyth's account. "How is the dearest, prettiest, gentlest love in the world?" cried Zack, taking her hand, and kissing it with boisterous fondness. "Ah! she lets other old friends kiss her cheek, and only lets me kiss her hand!—I say, Blyth, what a little witch she is; I'll lay you two to one she's guessed what I've just been saying to her."

A bright flush overspread the girl's face, while Zack addressed her. Her tender blue eyes looked up at him, shyly conscious of the pleasure that their expression was betraying; and the neat folds of her pretty grey dress, which had lain so still over her bosom when she was drawing, began to rise and fall gently now, when Zack was holding

her hand. If young Thorpe had not been the most careless, restless, and thoughtless of human beings—as much a boy still, in many respects, as when he was locked up in his father's dressing-room for bad behaviour at church—he might have guessed long ago, why he was the only one of Madonna's old friends whom she did not permit to kiss her on the cheek !

But Zack neither guessed, nor thought of guessing, anything of this sort. His flighty thoughts flew off in a moment from the young lady to his cigar-case ; and he walked away to the hearth-rug, twisting up a piece of waste paper into a lighter as he went.

When Madonna returned to her drawing, her eyes wandered timidly once or twice to the place where Zack was standing, when she thought he was not looking at her ; and, assuredly, so far as his personal appearance was concerned, young Thorpe was handsome enough to tempt any woman into glancing at him with approving eyes. He was over six feet in height ; and, though then little more than nineteen years old, was well developed in proportion to his stature. His

boxing, rowing, and other athletic exercises, had done wonders towards bringing his naturally vigorous, upright frame to the perfection of healthy muscular condition. Tall and strong as he was, there was nothing stiff or ungainly in his movements. He trod easily and lightly, with a certain youthful suppleness and hardy grace in all his actions, which set off his fine bodily formation to the best advantage. He had keen, quick, mischievous grey eyes—a thoroughly English red and white complexion—admirably bright and regular teeth—and curly light brown hair, with a very peculiar golden tinge in it, which was only visible when his head was placed in a particular light. In short, Zack was a manly handsome fellow, a thorough Saxon, every inch of him; and (physically speaking at least) a credit to the parents and the country that had given him birth.

“Hullo, Snooks!” said he, looking down at the cat who lay between his legs, “you’ve got another kitten, have you? and you’re doing as well as can be expected, you prolific little devil—eh? I say, Blyth, you and Madonna don’t

mind smoke ? ” — he added, lighting his cigar.

“No—no,” said Valentine. “But, Zack, you wrote me word that your father had taken all your cigars away from you——”

“So he has, and all my pocket-money too: But I’ve taken to helping myself, and got some glorious weeds. Try one, Blyth,” said the young gentleman, sublimely puffing out a stream of smoke through each nostril.

“Taken to helping yourself ! ” exclaimed Mr. Blyth. “What on earth do you mean ? ”

“Oh ! ” said Zack, “don’t be afraid. It’s not thieving ; it’s only barter. Look here, my dear fellow, I’ll tell you all about it. My friend, the junior clerk at the tea-shop, has three dozen weeds, and I have a beastly Albert neck-tie that’s only fit for a gent to wear. The junior clerk gives me the three dozen weeds, and I give the junior clerk the Albert neck-tie. That’s barter, and barter’s commerce, old chap ! It’s all my father’s fault ; he will make a tradesman of me. Ain’t I a good boy to be doing a bit of commerce already on my own account ? ”

"I'll tell you what, Zack," said Mr. Blyth, speaking rather absently in consequence of being professionally engaged at that moment in enlarging the folds of a Bacchante's blue petticoat. "I'll tell you what, I don't like the way you're going on in at all; your last letter made me very uneasy, I can promise you."

"You can't be half as uneasy as I am," rejoined Zack. "I'm jolly enough here, to be sure, because I can't help it somehow; but at home I'm the most miserable devil on the face of the earth. My father baulks me in everything, and makes me turn hypocrite, and take him in, in all sorts of ways—which I hate myself for doing; and yet can't help doing, because he forces me to it. Why does he want to make me live in the same slow way that he does himself? There's some difference in our ages, I rather think! Why don't he let me have a key of the door? Why does he bully me about being always home by eleven o'clock? I only want to amuse myself quietly as other chaps do. Upon my soul, Blyth, I believe he thinks it's my natural disposition to be gambling, quarrelling, seducing, running in

debt, and getting blind drunk every night of my life ! ”

“ Come, come, Zack ! don’t talk in that way, even in joke.”

“ Oh, yes ! it’s all very well, you old humbug, to shake your head at me ; but you wouldn’t like being forced into an infernal tea-shop, when you wanted to be an artist, if you were in my place. Look here ! What do you think I had to do yesterday ? They had a tea-tasting, as they call it, at the office. They made fifty small pots of fifty different sorts of tea, and poured them all out into fifty yellow gallipots. Then the principal partner puts a spoon into my hand and says ‘ Do as I do.’ And, by Jove, he goes all down the fifty gallipots, beginning at number one, and takes a spoonful from each, and rolls it about in his mouth, and then spits it out into a tin basin with a spout like they have at the dentists, and writes down in a book some abominable hocus-pocus of lines and dots, at the end of each spit, which he says is the character of the tea. And I have to imitate him ! Fifty of the spoonfuls, and fifty of the spits, and fifty

of the hocus-pocuses did I go through yesterday. I ask you, or any man, if it isn't too bad to force me into such a tea and expectoration line of business as that? Of course it is! But I've made up my mind: I want to be an artist, and I will be an artist. Don't lecture, Blyth—it's no use; but just tell me how I'm to begin learning, to draw."

This demand of Zack's touched Valentine on his weak point. Art was his grand topic; and to ask his advice on that subject, was to administer the sweetest flattery to his professional pride. He wheeled his chair round directly, so as to face young Thorpe. "If you're really set on being an artist," he began enthusiastically, "I rather fancy, Master Zack, I'm the man to help you. First of all, you know, you must start with drawing from the Antique (here he jumped up excitably). Begin, my boy, with the glorious works of Greek sculpture, which will teach you the eternal principles of Taste, and—and, in short everything. Stop! just wait one minute! there's a bit of work here that I must finish. Never mind my painting—I can use my brush and my tongue both together."

Here, Mr. Blyth returned in a great hurry to his picture; neglecting to move his chair round again, and perching himself briskly on the back rail. In this position he now began to throw a little more intellect (as he said) into the venerable bald head of the philosopher; who was represented in his composition as meditating profoundly on the gambols of the Dancing Nymphs.

"You'll be down directly, Blyth, if you sit like that," said Zack.

"Oh, no! I'm used to it," said Valentine; "I rather like the position; it reminds one of sitting on the top of a stile, and sketching from Nature in the country."

"By George, so it does!" cried Zack, taking a chair directly, and putting himself into Mr. Blyth's position; "but, I say! don't you find it cuts you a little, in the long run—eh?"

"So does a stile, if you sit long enough on it," rejoined Valentine, "But let's get back to what we were talking about. Let me see—what was I saying? Oh! the Antique. (Just hand me the palette-knife, will you?) Well, you must form

yourself on the Antique ; by which, you know, I mean Ancient Sculpture—look there ? just what Madonna's doing now ; *she's* forming herself on the Antique."

Zack went immediately to look at Madonna's drawing ; the outline of which was now finished. "Beautiful ! Splendid ! Ah, confound it, yes ! the eternal principles, and all that, just as you say, Blyth. A most wonderful drawing ! the finest thing of the kind I ever saw in my life !" Here he transferred his superlatives to his fingers, communicating them to Madonna through the medium of the Deaf and Dumb Alphabet, which he had superficially mastered with extraordinary rapidity under Mr. and Mrs. Blyth's tuition. Whatever Zack's friends did, Zack always admired with the wildest enthusiasm, and without an instant's previous consideration. Any knowledge of what he praised, or why he praised it, was a slight superfluity of which he never felt the want. If Madonna had been a great astronomer, and had shown him pages of mathematical calculations, he would have ejaculated vehement eulogies just as glibly as—by means of

hang me if I understand exactly what you *do* mean!"

"Gracious Heavens, Zack, in what criminal ignorance of art your parents must have brought you up! I mean drawing the living human figure from the living human being which sits at a shilling an hour, and calls itself a model."

"Ah, yes, to be sure! I understand now (in fact I had a sort of a glimmering before). Some of those people whose names are written here over your fireplace?—Delightful! Glorious! Drawing from the life—just the very thing I long for most. Hullo!" exclaimed Zack, turning round to read the confused memoranda above the chimney-piece, and lighting accidentally on the particular line which has been quoted in the chapter of this narrative that describes Valentine's studio—"Hullo! 'Daniel Sulsh, athletic model with beard.' Oh, Lord! how I should like to see Sulsh! I say, Blyth, is he the sort of chap I ought to begin upon?"

"He's a capital model," said Valentine, with a little hesitation; "his beard grows to his waist; and he has a splendid Farnese Hercules develop-

ment—in fact, we call him ‘Hercules Sulsh,’ in the profession. But he’s a difficult fellow to manage. Some people think him a little cracked; and he certainly does walk about with a black cocked hat, and rusty knee breeches—or, at least, he *did*; for he’s in the House of Correction now, poor fellow!”

“What have they put him in there for?” asked Zack.

“Well,” replied Mr. Blyth, “it’s not so easy to say. You must know, one of his oddities is that he sees Visions, which command him to do all sorts of extraordinary things—at least he says so himself. He got into this scrape, through seeing a Vision in the Laburnum Road, close by here. He was out walking, and stopped to look at a horse and gig, standing, without anybody to mind them, at a garden gate; the horse being tied up to a lamp-post. Well, he saw a Vision which commanded him to get into the gig, and drive out a couple of miles or so, on the Northern Road, for an airing to improve his health. (You may laugh, Zack; but he told me this himself, when I went to see him in

prison). I dare say you won't believe it; but he actually got into the gig and took his drive, and was met, coming back to Laburnum Road (with his health, he said, greatly benefitted) by the owner of the gig, who gave him in custody directly. His defence before the magistrate was that he couldn't possibly disobey the Vision, and that he was bringing the gig back to where he took it from, when he was caught. Everybody thought him mad, except the magistrate, who said he was drunk, and committed him, cocked hat and all, as a rogue and vagabond. He goes on having Visions, even in the House of Correction; and I dare say he'll come here and tell me about them, the first thing when he gets out. However, upon the whole, Zack, I shouldn't recommend your employing Sulsh—at least to begin with."

"Well, here's another name," said Zack, going on with the memoranda above the chimney-piece. "'Amelia Bibby'—oh, by Jove, a woman! That's much nicer than Sulsh. I'll begin with Amelia Bibby—eh, Blyth?"

"You may, if you go to the Royal Academy,"

said Valentine. "She sits there. She's a capital model, and so is her sister, Sophia. The worst of it is, they quarrelled mortally a little while ago; and now, if an artist has Sophia, Amelia won't come to him. And Sophia of course returns the compliment, and won't sit to Amelia's friends. It's very awkward for people who used to employ them both, turn and turn about, as I did."

"But what did they quarrel about?" inquired Zack.

"A tea-pot," answered Mr. Blyth. "You see, they are daughters of one of the late king's footmen, and are desperately proud of their aristocratic origin. They used to live together as happy as birds, without a hard word ever being spoken between them, till, one day, they happened to break their tea-pot, which of course set them talking about getting a new one. Sophia said it ought to be earthenware, like the last; Amelia contradicted her, and said it ought to be metal. Sophia said all the aristocracy used earthenware; Amelia said all the aristocracy used metal. Sophia said she was oldest, and knew best;

Amelia said she was youngest, and knew better. Sophia said Amelia was an impudent jackanapes; Amelia said Sophia was a plebeian wretch. From that moment, they parted. Sophia sits in her own lodging, and drinks tea out of earthenware; Amelia sits in *her* own lodging, and drinks tea out of metal. They swear never to make it up, and abuse each other furiously to everybody who will listen to them. Very shocking, and very curious at the same time—isn't it, Zack?"

"Oh, capital! Best bit of human nature I ever heard in my life," exclaimed the young gentleman, smoking with the air of a profound philosopher. "But tell me, Blyth, which is the prettiest, Amelia or Sophia? Metal or Earthenware? My mind's made up, beforehand, to employ the best looking of the two, if you have no objection."

"Which is the prettiest—eh?" said Mr. Blyth, slowly backing away from his picture into the middle of the room, and trying to speak about the nymphs, Amelia and Sophia, while his thoughts were all with their allegorical sisterhood on his own canvas. "Well, I really don't know;

they're both fine girls. Sometimes one looks best, and sometimes the other. Amelia, being the biggest and fattest of the two, is, of course—though I can hardly say whether Sophia's figure isn't upon the whole——. I beg your pardon, Zack ! I know I'm talking nonsense; but there's something bothers me just now in my picture, and I can't quite make out what it is. Dear, dear, dear me ! the foreground's in a mess somewhere ; and I can't for the life of me make out where."

"Oh, come, nonsense !" cried Zack, looking at the picture with his most confidently critical air. "It's the grandest foreground I ever saw in my life. Real poetry and—and, in fact, upon my soul what you call real poetry. That's my candid opinion, Blyth. If the patrons of art don't lug out handsomely to get such an inestimable gem as that picture——"

"Stop ! for heaven's sake, stop !" cried Valentine in a fever of excitement, "I've found it out. I've got at the mess in the foreground. It's in the bushes there, to the left of the figures. I've fetched out the nymphs and fetched out the

philosopher, and now I must fetch out the bushes. They're flat, and feeble, and funky in point of painting—they want a little vigour crisply pitched into them, and they shall have it!"

"Well, now you mention it, perhaps they do," said Zack. "But then the devil of it is, how are you to manage—eh?"

"I'll manage it in two seconds," said Mr. Blyth, whirling his palette-knife round and round in his hand, in a fine frenzy of artistic inspiration. "You have only to suppose those bushes furze-bushes in bloom; and it's done. Don't say a word yet, till I've fetched them fairly out by throwing every man jack of them into full bloom!"

Speaking thus, Mr. Blyth now proceeded to perform by one great effort those two difficult and delicate operations in art, technically described as "putting in taky touches, and bringing out bits of effect." These arduous final processes, are, as all painters know, only to be accomplished through the medium of certain mystic bodily evolutions, of the same intricate nature as those to which Valentine now abandoned himself.

He first took up a little bright yellow paint on the top of his palette-knife, and solemnly held it out from him at arm's length, frowning intently at his picture for a moment or so. Then he excitably jumped forward a step—then nervously jumped backward again into his former place; indecisively describing strange figures in the air with his palette-knife. Suddenly, the expected moment of artistic inspiration came. He ran at his picture as if he were about to jump, harlequin-fashion, through the canvas—smeared the yellow paint over the bushes; passing the palette-knife across them in one ferocious zig-zag sweep from end to end—rubbed the colour violently into the surface, at certain places, with the ball of his thumb—ran back in a great hurry to his former point of view in the middle of the room—dropped his head very much on one side—held up two fingers before the figure-part of the picture—and, in that position, surveyed with breathless attention the general effect of the bloom on the furze-bushes.

“I’ve done it!” exclaimed Valentine, drawing a long breath. “I’ve done it to my complete

satisfaction." (Here he made another dash at the bushes with his palette-knife and his thumb). "You look surprised, Zack. I dare say you never saw bits of effect thrown into a picture before: it's wonderful what we can do in art with our thumbs, in ticklish operations of this sort. Upon my honour, I'm so satisfied with the foreground, now I look at it again, that I think I shall give over work for the day, and take Madonna out to study effects of snow in the country. It's a deliciously bright, frosty afternoon for a walk. I wish you could come with us, Zack.—By-the-by, I mustn't forget what lots of advice I've still got to give you about the art. But, tell me first, are you really and truly determined to be a painter?"

"I mean to be a painter, or I mean to bolt from home," said Zack resolutely. "If you don't help me, I'll be off as sure as fate! I have half a mind to cut the tea-shop from this moment; and go out to study effects of snow with you and Madonna, instead of going back to cast up sums at the office. Stop a minute! By Jupiter! I'll toss up for it. Heads, liberty and the fine arts—Tails, the tea-shop. I've got a shilling in my pocket: here goes!"

"If you don't put the shilling back directly," said Valentine, "and stick to your engagements, I wash my hands of you ; but if you wait patiently, and promise to show all the attention you can, at least for the present, to your father's wishes, I'll teach you myself to draw from the antique. If somebody can be found who has influence enough with your father to get him to let you go into the Royal Academy, you must be prepared beforehand with a drawing that's fit to show. Now you shall come here, if you promise to be a good boy, and learn the A B C of Art, in the evening—every evening if you like. We'll have a regular little academy," continued Valentine, putting down his palette and brushes, and rubbing his hands in high glee ; "and if it isn't too much for Lavvie, the plaster model shall be set in her room ; and she shall draw, poor dear soul ! as well as the rest of us. There's an idea for you, Zack ! Mr. Blyth's Drawing Academy, open every evening with tea and muffins for industrious students. What do you say to it ?"

"Say ? by George, sir, I'll come every night, and get through acres of chalk and miles of drawing paper !" cried Zack, catching Valentine's

enthusiasm directly; "and what's more, I undertake to toast the muffins. I don't want to brag, but there's a young man now alive who's the greatest dab at toasting muffins that ever existed; his name is Zachary Thorpe, and he attends drawing academies, free, gratis, for nothing. Only let him eat his little whack out of what he toasts, and don't spare the butter, and——"

"Stop a minute, Zack," interposed Mr. Blyth. "What time ought you to be back in the city? it's two o'clock now."

"Oh! three o'clock will do. That greedy little beast of a junior clerk won't have stuffed down all his steaks and porter before three. I've got lots of time yet, for I mean to go back on the top of a 'bus."

"You have got about ten minutes more to stay," said Valentine, in his firmest manner. "Would you like to go up stairs, and say how d'ye do to Lavvie?—Ah, I needn't ask! Go at once then, and take Madonna with you; I'll follow as soon as I've put away my brushes."

Saying these words, Mr. Blyth walked to the place where Madonna was still at work. She was

so deeply engaged over her drawing that she had never once looked up from it, for the last quarter-of-an-hour, or more; and when Valentine patted her shoulder approvingly, and made her a sign to leave off, she answered by a gesture of entreaty, which eloquently enough implored him to let her proceed for a little while longer with her employment. She had never at other times been at all anxious to claim an indulgence of this kind, when she was drawing from the antique—but then, she had never, at other times, been occupied in making a copy which was secretly intended as a present for Zack.

Valentine, however, immediately induced her to relinquish her port-crayon. He laid his hand on his heart, which was the sign that had been adopted to indicate Mrs. Blyth. Madonna started up, and put her drawing materials aside directly.

Zack, having thrown away the end of his cigar, gallantly advanced and offered her his arm. As she approached, rather shyly, to take it, he also laid his hand on his heart, and pointed up stairs. The action was quite enough for her. She understood

immediately that they were going together to see Mrs. Blyth.

"Whether Zack really turns out a painter or not," said Valentine to himself, as the door closed on the two young people, "I believe I have hit on the best plan that ever was devised for keeping him steady. As long as he comes to me regularly, he can't break out at night, and get into mischief—that's one comfort." Here Mr. Blyth paused, and began to wash his brushes in a tin pot full of turpentine, whistling softly, as was often his way in thoughtful moments. "It's strange," he continued after a little while, still thinking of Zack, and drying a favourite brush by passing it backwards and forwards gently over the palm of his hand—"It's strange what an interest I have always felt in that racketty chap from the first. And, somehow, Lavvie and Madonna took to him directly, too, just as I did. I don't know anybody else that I would trust to be so intimate with our darling girl. But it's one blessed result of Zack's carelessness, that he don't ask prying questions about who she is, or where she comes from. No fear of her ever being traced out or taken away

from me through that lad, at any rate.—I only wish I could feel just as certain about everybody else as I have always felt about Zack !”

It would be well for many of us if we were reminded, now and then, of some practical truths which we are a little too universally ready to forget. It would have been well for Mr. Blyth if he had added to the poetical quotations written on the wall over his chimney-piece, the famous philosophical maxim which teaches mankind that the only way to pass through life without disappointment, is—NEVER TO FEEL CERTAIN ABOUT ANYTHING.

NOTE TO CHAPTER VIII.

I do not know that any attempt has yet been made in English fiction to draw the character of a "Deaf-Mute," simply and exactly after nature—or, in other words, to exhibit the peculiar effects produced by the loss of the senses of hearing and speaking on the disposition of the person so afflicted. The famous Fenella in Scott's "Peveril of the Peak," only *assumes* deafness and dumbness; and the whole family of dumb people on the stage have the remarkable faculty—so far as my experience goes—of always being able to hear what is said to them. When the idea first occurred to me of representing the character of a "Deaf-Mute" as literally as possible according to nature, I found the difficulty of getting at tangible and reliable materials to work from much greater than I had anticipated; so much greater indeed, that I believe my design must have been abandoned if a lucky chance had not thrown in my way Doctor Kitto's delightful little book, "The Lost Senses." In the first division of that work, which contains the author's interesting and touching narrative of his own sensations under the total loss of the sense of hearing, and its consequent effect on the faculties of speech, will be found my authority for most of those traits in Madonna's character which are especially and immediately connected with the deprivation from which she is represented as suffering. The moral purpose to be answered by the introduction of such a personage as

this, and of the kindred character of the Painter's Wife, lies, I would fain hope, so plainly on the surface, that it can be hardly necessary for me to indicate it even to the most careless reader. I know of nothing which more firmly supports our faith in the better parts of human nature, than to see—as we all may—with what patience and cheerfulness the heavier bodily afflictions of humanity are borne, for the most part, by those afflicted; and also to note what elements of kindness and gentleness the spectacle of these afflictions constantly develops in the persons of the little circle by which the sufferer is surrounded. Here is the ever bright side, the ever noble and consoling aspect of all human calamity; and the object of presenting this to the view of others, as truly, as worthily, and as tenderly as in him lies, seems to me to be a fit object for any writer who desires to address himself to the best and readiest sympathies of his readers.

W. W. C.

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